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# SOCRATES AND HIS FRIENDS

BY

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and now Literary Editor of the "Morning Post"*

H&S

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E B. O.



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## I

SOCRATES, the noblest spirit of ancient Greece and a prototype of the Christian saints ("*Sancte Socrates, ora pro nobis!*") exclaimed Erasmus, that perfect flower of Christian humanism, in the sixteenth century) was yet a creature of his own century and city. He bequeathed no writings of his own to posterity, and his teachings are known to us only through the reports of those who approved or disapproved of them. We have three different portraits of him, as seen through three divergent temperaments, which cannot easily be reconciled even in matters of the utmost consequence. One is a caricature in "*The Clouds*" of Aristophanes, the satirical representative of Athenian conservatism and a dramatic poet who seems to us half angel and half ape, who ridiculed him as the chief leader of a rationalistic movement which seemed fraught with the gravest peril to established religion and traditional morality. In the end this conception prevailed, and Socrates was condemned to



death by his fellow-citizens as a corrupter of youth who "speculated about the heavens above and inquired into the earth beneath and practised the art of making the worse appear the better."

In sharp contrast with this caricature is the portrait drawn from memory by Xenophon, a plain-spoken soldier and country gentleman in love with sport and so conservative-minded as to be "cast in a Dorian mould" and strongly pro-Spartan, which presents a personality that is the quintessence of kindly common sense. The Socrates of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* is a helpful friend in matters both great and small, a person pre-eminent for piety and self-control, and an enemy to all those vain and plausible speculations which do not make for private integrity and sound citizenship.

Much more elaborate is the picture which Plato, the most poetic of the world's philosophers, gives us in his dramatic discussions. There we have a convincing "close-up" of the complete Socrates in whom we find the moral earnestness ignored by Aristophanes and the power and originality of intellect which Xenophon could not appreciate. Plato's living portrait shows him among his pupils and

friends and opponents in philosophy, revealing him as a personage of extraordinary social charm despite an ungainly un-Greek exterior, a vigorous cross-examiner of all false pretenders to knowledge, a seeker after truth inspired by the sense of a divine mission, and one whose simple and sober life set an example of happy freedom from base and tyrannical needs. How far the Socrates of Plato differs from the real Socrates is a question which asks itself, but can never be finally answered. There can be little doubt that Plato made the protagonist of his Dialogues the mouth-piece of his far-reaching theories, though he may—I am tempted to say must—have found the germs of them all in his master's teaching. For the rest, if in a sense he idolised the thinker, he did not idealise the man—for the modern habit of hero-worship was unknown to the ancient Greeks, whose ruthless sense of reality saved them from every form of sentimentalism.

These are contemporary portraits, and in an altogether different category from the curious dust-heap of a memoir in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Philosophers*, which was compiled several centuries later, when biography had fallen

into its anecdotage. For the little stories illustrating Socrates' capacity for the plain living which goes with high thinking and for much other material Diogenes is largely indebted to Xenophon. We gather from his compilation, however, a few significant facts, *e.g.*, that Socrates was the son of Sophroniscus, a carver of stone, and that he himself worked at the trade. A sculptor's yard would provide as good an apprenticeship to the lesser realities as a carpenter's shop, and this early environment explains Socrates' partiality for illustrations drawn from various handicrafts—a peculiarity which Plato always bears in mind and uses to good purpose.

## II

It is impossible to grasp the significance of the three portraits of this amazing man without a knowledge of their historic background. He was a patriotic citizen of the Athens whose thrilling history he shared for more than seventy years, and Professor Gilbert Murray's sagacious saying, "The real religion of the fifth century was a devotion to the city itself" is as applicable to him as to any other Greek

of his period. He was, in fact, a product of that extraordinary evolution—so swift in its vicissitudes as to present the aspect of a revolution—which changed Athens in three generations from one of several little self-centred communities to an Imperial city justly entitled to the appellation, “Eye of Greece,” not only because of her political supremacy, but also because of her leadership in intellectual and artistic matters. The appearance of a Socrates in Sparta or Corinth or Thebes, or in any of the well-to-do Greek settlements in the westward reaches of the Mediterranean, is quite unthinkable. If we choose to think of Socrates as the incarnate conscience of his social world, as standing in the same relation to it as his own “something divine” or internal monitor did to himself, we must remember he remained an Athenian of the Athenians. As we overhear him to-day—in conditions of low audibility at times owing to the loss of so much documentary evidence, which would have been invaluable—he is a still great voice that always has a prejudice in favour of Athens and speaks in Athenian accents. He was sought out by youthful young men from other Greek cities, it is true, but neither in his lifetime nor

afterwards was he in any sense the Panhellenic philosopher. This can be seen in Aristotle's estimate of him, in which we have the verdict of Stagira, as it were, on a personage of Athens—a verdict with an indefinable taint of provincialism.

Before the opening of the fateful fifth century neither Athena's city nor her people differed in any marked degree from the other petty Greek states. It may be there were signs of quicker intelligence, of a keener spirit of enterprise. Herodotus praises Athenians for their "social gift" and conversational powers, and among the law-givers and political reformers of sixth century Greece Solon and Cleisthenes were the most famous of all. The Athenians, moreover, could, and did, boast that they were the original inhabitants of Attica and so the heirs to an older civilisation than any of their neighbours. The influx of fighting barbarians from the north known as the Dorian invasion had passed them by, partly because of the physical obstacles separating their unproductive plain from the Peloponnesus, but chiefly because a southerly march of conquest offered the invaders a richer and easier reward. So Attica kept its old Ionian population and the old Ionic speech

practically unchanged. Yet, at the close of the sixth century neither in her outward aspect nor in her communal life did Athens seem destined to become pre-eminent among the Greek city-states. Athena's town, to quote from Walter Pater's "Greek Studies," was still "that little earlier Athens of Peistratus which the Persians destroyed, which some of us, perhaps, would rather have seen, in its early simplicity, than the greater one . . . its little buildings on the hill-top, still with steep rocky ways, crowding round the ancient temple of Erechtheus and the grave of Cecrops, with the old miraculous olive tree still growing there, and the old snake of Athena Polias still alive somewhere in the temple court." No other Greek city then looked to Athens for leadership, and not one was afraid or jealous of her.

It was the life-and-death struggle with Persia which gave Athens a place apart in the Greek world. The Athenians were the heroes of the Persian War, as Herodotus, writing half a century later, admitted at the risk of offending some of his patrons. "It is not too much," he observes, "to call them the saviours of Hellas, for whichever side they took, victory was bound to follow them." They alone had

a clear vision of the dreadful consequence to Greece of servitude to a great Oriental Power. The Persians were monotheists and, though they had been tolerant in their treatment of alien religions in subject lands, success in a war of vengeance and conquest might have infected them with the ruthless bigotry of Islam in a later age. It is at any rate certain that all the time-honoured temples of Greece with their kindly gods and goddesses created in the image of men would have met the same fate as the ancient abode of deity on the Athenian Acropolis. And all the tender shoots of "government of the people by the people for the people,"<sup>1</sup> which were growing in Greek nurseries, would surely have been rooted up.

A similar clash of religions and cultures began two centuries and a half later, when Rome and Carthage entered on their grim and ghastly warfare for world domination. The fate of Carthage is one of the most famous "lost causes" in history, and the general belief that Rome's victory made for the advancement of mankind has been challenged by qualified historians. But

<sup>1</sup> Lincoln's Gettysburg oration might be a Greek utterance. It would have pleased the Athenians who listened to the Funeral Speech of Pericles.

nobody, so far as I know, has ever ventured to suggest that the reduction of Greece to a Persian satrapy ruled by some courtier of the "Great King" could have profited posterity in any way whatsoever. The many attempts in modern times to realise the democratic ideal, which was an Athenian discovery, may have proved disappointing. But it was, is, and perhaps will always be, a principle of vitality in human affairs, where belief in the impossible and the struggle for what is unattainable have achieved so much more than obedience to the practical logic of circumstance.

The valour and sense of duty of the slow-thinking, slow-moving Spartans were a chief factor, no doubt, in the defeat of the Persian invaders. The glorious death of Leonidas and his long-haired warriors at Thermopylæ, which was commemorated in the noblest of all epitaphs:

"Go, tell the Spartans thou who passest by  
That here obedient to their laws we lie"

was a proof, no doubt, that Greece would in the long run prove unconquerable. It is often forgotten, however, that the Spartan King could never have held out but for the co-operation of Themistocles' warships on his seaward flank. (Just so most



historians in their appreciation of Wolfe's victory over Montcalm have ignored the pivotal factor of British sea-power, without the support of which the attack on Quebec could never have been made.) For all that, the free growth of Greek ideals and institutions, which have provided modern nations with so many priceless object-lessons, to say nothing of Freedom's timeless terminology, might have been fatally arrested by a long period of Oriental domination but for the far-sighted leadership and historic devotion of Athens. She had been moved by her love of liberty (even the liberty of others), her feeling of racial solidarity, and her spirit of enterprise, to support the Asiatic Greeks in their revolt against the Great King, and an Athenian contingent had helped the forces of the Ionian cities which had revolted in 499 B.C. to destroy Sardis, the Persian capital of Western Asia Minor. The Persian rule was detested: one of the chief causes of Ionian discontent being the system adopted by Darius of establishing Greek tyrants in the various cities to govern their fellow-countrymen in his interest. Though the rebellion spread to Caria, to the Hellespont and even to Cyprus, retribution was not long delayed. In 494 B.C. the Persian

commanders appeared before Miletus and, having taken it after a long blockade, proceeded to sack the city and massacre all its male inhabitants. At Athens the news of the fate of the capital of Ionian civilisation was received with consternation and horror. Their own ships had been withdrawn after the sack of Sardis, but they knew the Persian despot would neither forgive nor forget. Indeed, the wrath of Darius was chiefly directed against Athens, and every night when he sat down to sup, a slave was ordered to repeat three times the words: "Sire, remember the Athenians!" For the first time in her existence Athens was one of the principal actors in the perilous game of world-politics, as the world then was. It was the beginning of her epic years, in which the victories of Marathon and Salamis, ranking among the decisive battles of world-history, are the most glorious episodes. No doubt the numerical strength of Xerxes' expeditionary force has been grossly exaggerated, partly for patriotic reasons and partly because the ancient Greeks were always vague about big numbers. The estimate of Herodotus that the infantry alone numbered 1,700,000 and the whole personnel about three times that number is

as incredible as the story that the rivers encountered by the moving host were drunk dry by its men and beasts of burden. Yet few modern critics put the total at less than a quarter of a million, much less accept Delbrück's contention that the Greeks had a numerical advantage in all the great battles.

The thrilling story of the successful defiance of Greece, which was completed with the victories of Plataea and Mycale, must be sought elsewhere. During the tremendous struggle Athens had shrunk from no hazard, howsoever desperate, and at the close of it was accepted as the leader of Greece, except by her "yoke-fellow," Sparta, whose incapacity for framing constructive policies at once became apparent. Sinister signs of the unpatriotic power of faction had been noted during the most critical moments; most significantly, indeed, when the pro-Persian party in Athens flashed a shield from the mountain-top above the plain of Marathon as an intimation that they were ready to open the gates of the city to the invader. Always the enmity of oligarchs and democrats, really a form of class-warfare, was more deadly than the open rivalries of the Greek city-states. When the Persian peril was

over, however, Athens was able to organise a great maritime confederacy to prevent the launching by Persia of another war of conquest. In this confederacy Athens was at first only *prima inter pares*; each confederate state providing a fixed number of ships and men, according to its resources, and insular Delos being the nominal head, though it was left to the "predominant partner" to make the best use of the joint sea-power. By the logic of circumstance, however, primacy became dominion, and in the end Athens emerged as a kind of tyrant city. In the first place, the troublesome contributions in ships and men were commuted for annual sums paid into the common treasury at Delos, a change which enriched the fund and increased the economic power of Athens, while at the same time reducing the fighting strength of the contributing states. In course of time the treasure was transferred—by common consent, not by any high-handed action on the part of the Athenians—from Delos to the Acropolis, and from that time on Athens was really an imperial state exacting an annual tribute from subject communities. The new city which arose from the ashes of the old had long since prepared itself for the rôle of a triumphant

sea-power. Soon after Salamis it had been fortified, and twenty years later the Long Walls had been built which connected it with the port of Peiræus and enabled the Athenians to draw sustenance from the sea even though the whole of the plain of Attica should be occupied by an hostile army. With the Delian tribute to draw on and the increasing wealth derived from commercial enterprise, backed by naval supremacy, Athens had become an "amphibious power" of great strength by the middle of the fifth century. The indomitable energy and enterprise of the Athenians in the middle of the fifth century shines forth from a grey stone preserved in Paris at the Louvre which bears the following inscription: *Of the Erechtheid tribe, these are they who died in the war in Cyprus, in Egypt, in Phœnice, in Ægina, at Megara, in the same year.* A proud, though simply-worded epitaph, which recalls the saying of Pericles that "the whole earth is the sepulchre of famous men" and, justifies George Santayana's comparison of the ancient Athenians to those who have shown the English flag all over the globe, as well as my own couplet:

"I deem the Englishman a Greek grown old,  
Deep waters crossed and many a watch-fire cold."

In 451 B.C. Athens had become so powerful that no plan of ambition could have seemed impracticable to her citizens. The Ægean could have been described as an Athenian lake, and it seemed probable that the same description would presently be applicable to the Adriatic. The practical annexation of Bœotia and Megara had given Athens control of the land communications with the Peloponnese, and the dream of a great land-empire, as well as the command of the seas, seemed about to be realised.

But Athens was not destined to become an amphibious empire, a Leviathan that could be both whale and elephant. She had to reckon with Sparta, that strange, self-contained community of fighting men, descendants of the Dorian invaders, whose whole life was a training for warfare. In the seventh century the Spartans were a pleasure-loving folk, much given to dance and song and having a predilection for ease and luxury. They had reduced the aboriginal inhabitants of the vale of Lacedæmon to utter servitude; the Helots, as they were called, were the most down-trodden people in the whole of Greece. In the second half of the eighth century, when the other Greek communities were solving their economic problems by peaceful

expansion overseas, Sparta found her remedy in the conquest of the Messenian valley beyond the lofty range of Mount Taygetus, and the enslavement of its inhabitants, who were mainly drawn from the same stock as the Helots. Their land was portioned out among the conquerors, and their labour requisitioned to help provide for the mess-tables of Sparta. Two generations later, however, the Messenians rebelled, and it was only after a long and stubborn war that they were once more reduced to the status of mere chattels of the soil. The significance of this deadly struggle was not lost on the exhausted victors. To control a serf population outnumbering them by fifteen to one, the free citizens must make arms their sole vocation, putting aside all the amenities of life enjoyed by the other Greek city-states. So, for safety's sake, the Spartans transformed their whole social system and became a people apart, who made physical fitness and skill in fighting the only object of living. Thus Sparta became the iron-bound model of a powerful oligarchy, to which all the opponents of democratic institutions throughout Greece looked for help.

Athens v. Sparta, which is another way

of saying democracy v. oligarchy was the dominant issue of Greek home politics. During the years which followed the Persian War Sparta's power even in the Peloponnese rapidly declined. A terrible earthquake in 464 B.C., followed by a revolt of the Helots, who held out on the great hill of Ithome in the Messenian plain for ten years, actually compelled her to seek the help of the Athenians, who were more skilful in siege tactics. Meanwhile the trade and prestige of Athens were increasing yearly, and the rise to power of Pericles was the beginning of a period of brilliant progress in every direction—a vivid contrast to the marking-time of the military community in the valley of the Eurotas.

Though her dream of an empire in the mainland speedily vanished, owing to the successful revolt of Thebes and Megara, the extension of her overseas commerce was ample compensation. The extent of it can be deduced from the following list of imports drawn up in 429 by the comedian Hermippus: "Hides and vegetable relish from Cyprus; grain and meat from Italy; pork and cheese from Syracuse; sails and papyrus from Egypt; frankincense from Spain; cyprus wood from Crete; ivory from Libya; chestnuts and almonds



from Paphlagonia ; dates and fine wheat-flour from Phœnicia ; rugs and cushions from Carthage ; from Rhodes, raisins ; from Eubœa, pears and fat sheep ; slaves from Phrygia ; mercenaries from Arcadia ; and from Perdiccas, King of Macedonia—lies by the shipload ! ” The development of commerce was always the basis of Periclean policy. But Pericles was a man of such many-sided genius that it was not enough for him to make Athens a kind of greater Corinth. He combined in his character gifts which are seldom found together. He boasted of the versatility of his fellow citizens, but was himself a type of the universal man. His interests were intellectual and artistic, yet no demagogue ever handled a mutinous mob more cleverly. Where other statesmen had a port, he had a presence, and the severe and majestical air and studied aloofness, which caused him to be called the “ Olympian,” made his rare appearances on the platform so impressive as to overawe all opposition.

For more than thirty years he was able to dominate and direct a body of citizens of unequalled intelligence, of whom a modern writer has said : “ the average ability of the Athenian race was on the lowest estimate very nearly two grades above our

own, that is about as much as our race is above that of the American negro."

He it was who swept away the last vestiges of aristocratic privilege in the Athenian constitution. In 460, acting with Ephialtes, he deprived the Areopagus of its power of banishing officials for violation of the law, which gave it a veto over progressive action; allowing it, however, to survive as a court for trying charges of murder. This change was tantamount to reducing our House of Lords to an Old Bailey. The body of citizens was thus left in possession of full sovereignty, exercising it in judicial matters through large juries over which an Archon presided, and in matters of legislation and policy through its Assembly on the Pnyx hill. The will of the Assembly was carried out by the Ten Strategi or Generals, elected each year by direct popular vote. The Strategi were responsible for naval and military organisation, finance, food supply, etc., and their President was the nearest any Greek democracy ever got to a modern Prime Minister. Thanks to his almost continuous election to this office, Pericles was able to control the home and domestic policy of Athens in such a way as to provide for future emergencies which he alone foresaw.

He stood for peace, though never for peace at any price, and the Thirty Years' Truce, which was concluded in 445 B.C. and assigned supremacy on land to Sparta and control of the sea to Athens, left Pericles in a position to achieve his ambition of making Athens the most magnificent city in all Greece. The creation of the Parthenon, which cost 700 talents (£840,000) and of the colossal gold-and-ivory statue of the goddess installed there which cost 1,000 talents (£1,240,000) involved expenditure on a scale which even the wealthy cities of Sicily and Magna Græcia had never dreamed of. The temple of Zeus at Olympia, which was finished in 456 B.C., was built out of a treasure that had been accumulating for a century, and Olympia, a gathering-point of all the Hellenes, also had the whole of Greece to draw on for contributions. In order to obtain the necessary funds the tribute from the subject cities of the Delian Confederacy, which had been relaxed, was once more exacted to the full. Naturally the conservative faction opposed this use of what was really "ship money," and their leader, Thucydides, son of Melesias—not to be confused with Thucydides, the historian, who was the son of Olorus—said that he

was making Athens "like a vain woman decking herself out with trinkets." However, it was the will of the city that these works of adornment should be completed, and between 447 and 431 at least 8,000 talents (£9,600,000) was spent on temples, statues, including two Victories in gold, the Propylæa, or approach to the Parthenon which was never finished, an Odeum or singing-hall, and various buildings for the defence as well as the decoration of the city. Modern critics, following the lead of the lesser Thucydides, have blamed Pericles for spending such huge sums on works which were economically worthless. The subject cities were naturally indignant, and the building of the Parthenon was actually suspended for a short time when Samos and Byzantium rebelled, in 440, the two years of warfare required to reduce them involving an expenditure of 1,276 talents out of the reserve treasure.

Yet, it is impossible to take the economist's view of these creative activities. The Parthenon would have cost far more than it did, if it had not been built by enthusiastic craftsmen, as eager to do honour to their deity and their city as the medieval creators of the Cathedral of Amiens (called by Viollet "the Parthenon

of Gothic Architecture"), who worked for a pittance on which a modern artisan would starve. They expressed their idealism in terms of marble, ivory, and gold, and it would have been a fatal loss to mankind if the frugal city had grudged the necessary expenditure on immortal masterpieces, into which every citizen had built a portion of his spirit.

The Thirty Years' Truce lasted only fifteen years. It proved impossible for a self-respecting community to avoid collision with the granite block (the phrase applied by Bismarck to Prussia) of Lacedæmonian land-power, which was never quite as immobile as it looked. Thucydides makes it clear that it was the growth of Athenian power and prestige and the alarm it inspired in Lacedæmon which made war inevitable. Every city of any consequence, in Greece or Greek waters, had to take one side or the other in this struggle of sea-power with land-power, democracy with oligarchy, Ionian with Dorian. And nearly every city was engaged in a sort of civil warfare as well as in military operations in aid of Athens or Sparta, as the case might be, for the pro-Athenian and pro-Spartan factions, which were found in the majority of belligerent communities came to hate

one another more than they hated Sparta or Athens, the two great symbols of cultures in collision. In Corcyra and other places a "Terror" was apt to ensue whenever a faction was able to overcome its opponents, with or without the enemy's help, and the most horrible things were done in these internal feuds. Even when a faction which favoured the enemy was unable to take action, it could be a cancer in the bowels of the State.

The policy which Pericles had translated into terms of stone proved sufficient for the safety of Athens. When the great army, 30,000 strong, of Sparta and her Peloponnesian allies was being mobilised in the spring, all the country-folk of Attica moved into the city, bringing their goods and chattels, including the woodwork of the farmhouses, while their sheep and beasts of burden were sent over to Eubœa and the adjacent islands. The Peloponnesian forces marched into Attica when the corn was ripe, ravaged the country, and camped outside Athens for a few weeks. When their provisions were exhausted, they marched home again, without having gained any military advantage. It was not easy for a proud people to watch the enemy burning their farms without any

attempt at reprisals. Pericles found great difficulty in restraining them and was abused for not leading out the army which, as President of the Ten Generals, he himself commanded. But when he sent a fleet of a hundred ships round the Peloponnese and closed the sea to the enemy, treating all vessels voyaging there as privateers, he regained his popularity. The fortified city with its Long Walls would have been impregnable, even if the Spartans had been skilled in siege-craft, which was not the case.

In the late spring of 430, however, an appalling catastrophe befell the city, which knew nothing of hygiene or sanitation. Athens, even when huts were built between the Long Walls, was shockingly overcrowded; the influx of refugees must have nearly trebled the population (about 120,000 before the war). The plague broke out, one in every four inhabitants perishing, while none that had been stricken recovered their normal health. Yet, despite this terrible loss of life, the city could never have fallen as long as she refrained from wasting her man-power and money-power in adventures which were beyond her strength.

Thucydides, perhaps the greatest of all historians, who anticipated the modern

methods of scientific deduction introduced a century ago by Ihne and Niebuhr, has told the story of this intensive, prolonged, and ruthless struggle with incomparable power and skill. Even a bald outline of the ordeal in which Imperial Athens disappeared, cannot be given in this place. But Thucydides makes it clear—and all subsequent research has confirmed the conclusion—that the Athenians were largely responsible for their downfall. "War," writes Thucydides, "by removing the comfortable provision of daily life, educates men by violence and causes their characters to fit their conditions." The truth of this saying and other wise and weighty words from the same unageing authority have been brought home to us in our own Great War. The plague brought about a loss of morale from which Athens never really recovered; she had lost her power of sane and steady thought in a crisis; and the standard of her statesmanship was fatally lowered. Power was entrusted to men such as Cleon ("in all respects the most violent man in the city," according to the historian) and other demagogues who fostered the fatal idea that the object of Athenian warfare should be the creation of a world-wide sea empire, living by



plunder and the tribute of subject cities, and not the peace and security which would have been the objective of Pericles, had he recovered from the debilitating *sequelæ* of the plague and lived to direct the war policy of Athens. Pericles, though he understood the scope and intent of warfare as well as, say, Clausewitz, was no militarist. We learn that from Plutarch's anecdote, which tells us how, when on the eve of death, he wished to be remembered as one who had never caused any Athenian to wear a mourning robe unnecessarily. He would, surely, have done his utmost to check the mad war spirit which prompted Cleon's advice to put the whole male population of revolting Mitylene to death as a lesson in loyalty to the other tributary cities (saner councils prevailed before it was too late and only the ringleaders of the rebellion were executed<sup>1</sup>) and the subsequent massacre of the Melians after their heroic defence of ancient liberties. And he would have been utterly opposed to the reckless squandering of Athenian resources on the Sicilian Expedition, the greatest gamble in Greek history, which was undertaken at a time when the city's reserves of man-power

<sup>1</sup> These, however, numbered a thousand, as Thucydides observes with a grim brevity.

and money-power were barely sufficient to maintain her position in the Ægean.

It is curious that Plato's *Dialogues*, though most of them are supposed to occur during the war-years, give us hardly a hint of the tremendous events and dramatic vicissitudes which must have been agitating all men's minds. We meet Alcibiades, but should never guess the amazing part he played in the War, if Plato were our only informant. Alcibiades, it is true, is made to tell us about Socrates' own war services. At Potidæa, in 432, when Potidæians and Corinthians fought against the Athenians, the philosopher had saved his life by refusing to leave him when wounded, and rescuing him and his arms. He showed the same cool courage after the Athenian defeat at Delium eight years later, where Socrates fought as one of 7,000 heavy-armed infantry and was seen retreating by his pupil : "stalking like a pelican and rolling his eyes, calmly contemplating both enemies and friends, and making it quite clear to all and sundry that anybody who attacked him would meet with a stout resistance." So he and his comrade Laches got off safely, for only those who run away headlong are personally pursued in a retreat. Except for these references the *Dialogues*

ignore the life-and-death struggle in which Athens was engrossed, and the only literary parallel I know of to this strange detachment is to be found in the novels of Jane Austen, in which the alarums and excursions of the Napoleonic Wars are never even overheard.

### III

Fifth-century Athenians seem to have been interested in poetry rather than in philosophy. That is to say, speculative inquiries into the nature of the world without, which were discussed by groups of thinkers in other Greek cities, had less appeal for them than the poetical presentations of religious and moral issues by their three great dramatists, Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. All three tragedians, whose works must have more closely resembled an oratorio than a modern play, were in a sense philosophers, seeking the ultimate truths that lay behind current theology and customary morals. The profoundest thinker of the three was Æschylus, whose huge and magniloquent tragedies, full of reverberating words with "shaggy crests and beetling brows" (to use the humorous description of Aristophanes),

strove to discover a divine significance in the inexplicable disasters of human life. After his death (456) he had far more influence than Sophocles, the pattern of pious orthodoxy and an impeccable artist, and Euripides, whose bitter realism, touched with pitifulness, was regarded as revolutionary by his contemporaries. Æschylus came to be accepted as the prophet and seer of Athens' great age and the inspired teacher of all the civic virtues that made its greatness. To the men of his age he was first and foremost a soldier and a patriot, and this opinion—an instance of the practical outlook of the ancient Athenians which, like their frugality and carefulness in expenditure, suggests a resemblance to the modern Scot<sup>1</sup>—is well expressed in the epitaph which was chosen for his tomb, or, perhaps, written by himself:

“ This tomb hides Æschylus, Athenian born,  
Euphorion's son, amid far Gela's corn—  
How good a fighter, Marathon could tell,  
The long-haired Persian knows it but too well.”

People who could thus dismiss the tragical poetry of Æschylus as a mere detail

<sup>1</sup> I am not the only “ Grecian ” who has noted “ something of the Shorter Catechist ” in many typical Athenians. For more reasons than one was Edinburgh once styled the Modern Athens !

were not likely to be intrigued by the lofty, but utterly unpractical, theories of the philosophers of Miletus.

It was at Miletus, destroyed by the Persians in 494 and now a mere morass, that philosophy, divorced from the problems of religion and conduct, made its first efforts to discover the true nature of the Universe, seeking truth for truth's sake and no other reason whatsoever. The real advance made by the Ionian fathers of Western thought was, as Professor Burnet says in his monumental work on *Early Greek Philosophy*, "that they left off telling tales. They gave up the hopeless task of describing what was, when as yet there was nothing, and asked instead what all things really are now." Had they not thus broken through custom by the force of reflection, trusting in the guidance of reason, it is at least doubtful whether a progressive civilisation would ever have existed to-day.

The first problem on which they fixed their attention was the spectacle of constant change. Things were always coming into being and passing away, and yet they did not come from nothing or pass away into nothing. A pageant of perpetual transformation, but of what? What was the

one thing which took on so many Protëan shapes? Thales, the first of these intellectual adventurers, said it was water. Anaximander thought it was an infinite substance out of which not only water, but also fire which wages with it a fruitless war are, as it were, segregated. Anaximenes identified this basal substance with mist or vapour, which could either be rarified and warmed into fire or condensed and cooled into water. The Milesian school ceased to exist with Miletus, but its work was carried on at Ephesus by Heraclitus, called the "weeping philosopher" because he found in man's life only matter for tears.

He saw in fire the primary substance. Is not flame perpetually nourished by fuel and perpetually passing into smoke? Furthermore, flame is so swift a thing that we may believe that man's thoughts are of like nature, and that the human mind is part of the eternal fire. But the real importance of Heraclitus in the history of philosophy is the stress he laid on the process of flux in which all things are everlastingly involved. You cannot step twice, he insisted, into the same river; for the water into which you first stepped will by now have flowed on, and other water will have taken its place. But, if

the whole of the universe is thus "an ever-rolling stream," where can a solid permanent basis of knowledge be found? For it is clear that what was true one moment ceases to be true the next. Parmenides, also an Ionian, but settled at Elea in Southern Italy, attempted to confute this theory of flux. The river, he argued, though its waters are for ever rolling on, always remains the same river; so that its perpetual flux, and all other such changeful phenomena, are illusions which veil an unchanging reality. These early philosophers, whose theories strike us moderns (with the benefit of twenty-three centuries of further philosophical reasoning) as sometimes fantastic and sometimes surprisingly profound, never arrived at a realisation of the part played by the human mind in such problems. Anaxagoras of Clazomene, who was a personal friend of Pericles, came close to the vital discovery, when he explained all substances as composed of "germs" (atoms, as we should say), infinite in number and arranged in various ways, and suggested that Mind was the force that arranged them. Yet even he could not escape from the error of Thales, who thought in terms of the physical; for his Mind was also a corporeal

substance like the rest, though infinitely rare and tenuous. This physical philosophy, however, made for the advancement of what we now call science, as may be seen from the fact that Anaxagoras declared that the sun was a red-hot stone "as large as the Peloponnese," which is a far nearer approximation to the truth than was possible in the earlier Middle Ages. He might have been burnt for holding such a belief then, and it was imputed to Socrates as a sacrilegious notion by his accusers. The doctrines of Pythagoras, who discovered that the Earth was a sphere, equally failed to find the next starting-point, though they were nearer to philosophy properly so-called than to physics. He took Number as the pivotal principle in the composition of matter, but he and his ascetic brotherhood, pledged to live according to the Orphic rules of purity and for philosophic contemplation, lost their way in a maze of symbolism, finding in various numbers that fantastic significance which even to-day is an obsession with writers on occult subjects, such as fortune-telling by Numerology.

The solution of the problem came from the universal need, which was especially felt at Athens, for some form of higher



education. All Athenian boys from the age of six to fourteen went to school, escorted by a "pedagogue" or sort of male nurse, where they were taught to write, tracing their letters on small tablets of wax, to do sums with the help of a reckoning board, and to read and recite the works of Homer ("the Poet") and Hesiod. As every Athenian gentleman was expected to be a musician and an all-round athlete, a boy afterwards attended special schools, run by private enterprise, for that purpose. At eighteen he was expected to serve his apprenticeship to arms, though it seems probable that a compulsory course of training, beginning at Athens and continued at the frontier outposts of Attica, was not instituted by the State until the fourth century. From fourteen to eighteen, then, his time would be mainly spent in the wrestling school, since no further mental education was available, and something had to be done to fill the gap and fit him for seizing the opportunities for advancement afforded by the Assembly and the Law Courts, where a mastery of rhetoric, the art of persuasion, was invaluable. Hence the appearance of the sophists, who provided the equivalent of our modern University training. Not one

of the philosophers I have mentioned was Athenian-born, and it was one of the chief aims of Pericles to attract to Athens men who were capable of teaching philosophy and imparting true knowledge and the love of wisdom to their pupils. It was necessary that the Periclean democracy, that many-headed autocrat, should carry out its legislative and legal duties with enlightened intelligence, and everybody—except, here and there, an Æschylean Conservative or “Die-hard”—felt that the presence of teachers with the highest qualifications were as vital to the welfare of Athens as the influx encouraged by the master-statesman of foreign traders and craftsmen. As the same demand for higher education had sprung up in other Greek cities, there was a “boom” in philosophic studies and the supply of teachers was soon adequate; Athens, having more to offer than her competitors for their services, getting the best men available—just as to-day opulent America can secure the most famous European scholars to fill her professorial chairs.

In fifth-century Greece the word sophist merely connoted a teacher of wisdom; it had not taken on the sinister suggestion of charlatanism, which now clings to it. Cities

were as proud of producing or procuring a famous sophist as modern countries are, or ought to be, of numbering an Einstein or Gilbert Murray among their native or adopted sons. Many of the sophists were men of great distinction. For example, there was Protagoras of Abdera, a "most dignified personage," who would say to any paying pupil: "My young friend, if you associate with me, you will be a better man on the first day, and better still next day, and so better and better every following day." His was a practical training aiming at practical results. He did not believe that absolute truth was attainable, and his famous saying that "Man is the measure of all things," though it indicated the right direction of the quest for eternal verities, in the world within rather than in the world without, yet in his applications of it reduced Right and Wrong to matters of human conviction and expediency. Herodotus was perhaps making a humorous allusion to this unprincipled principle when he depicts the horror of an Eastern tribe, who were accustomed to *eat* their aged parents, on learning that the Greeks *burnt* theirs. Prodicus of Ceos—the tiny island which sent four ships to Salamis and gave birth to the "Ceian Nightingales,"

Simonides and Bacchylides—and Gorgias of Leontini were specialists in the refinements of speech. The former was an adept in verbal quibbles, the latter was the Euphues of his age, teaching a style of calculated antithesis, which influenced Thucydides and other writers. These men helped to make the Greek language the most delicate instrument of expression any race has ever possessed. Most picturesque of all was Hippias of Elis, master of all sciences, arts and crafts who once appeared at the Olympic Games, that Panhellenic world's fair, in garments and ornaments all of his own making—clothes, ring, oil-bottle, shoes, and a marvellous Persian girdle—and with his pockets stuffed with epics, tragedies, songs and prose essays. He had also perfected a system of mnemonics whereby, if he once heard a string of fifty names, he could repeat them all without a mistake. The aspiring youth and the grown man anxious to make good the gaps in his early education eagerly resorted to these sages and cheerfully paid the fees they asked for a series of lessons, which varied according to length and a pupil's capacity to pay. Prodicus charged the equivalent of £2 for a particular course but had a shorter one for ~~ten~~ 1. The desire

of these peripatetic professors for profitable popularity caused many of them to provide the public with short-cuts to wisdom, which really led nowhere. But the theories, even when fallacious or even fraudulent, encouraged philosophical discussion, and out of the clash of opinions arose a philosophy which concerned itself with human affairs rather than with cosmogonies. In the person of Socrates, in whose company we meet good, bad, and indifferent sophists, this human philosophy took its stand in market-places and at street-corners and tried to teach the average man how to think rightly and live righteously. Socrates, unlike the sophists who were rolling stones and often persuaded by their experiences in far-separated cities that what was right in one place was wrong in another (like modern travellers who declare that morality is a matter of climate) insisted that there were permanent natures of justice, courage, goodness and so forth. And it was from him that Plato found deliverance from the doubts concerning the possibility of true knowledge which had been implanted in him by the Heraclitean doctrine received from his first master, Cratylus.

The first sight of Athens in the age of Pericles, whether approached by sea or by land, must have thrilled the visitor. Even to-day the ruined Parthenon, the pillars of which have weathered to a mellow golden hue, can "bring the heart to one's lips," as a friend of mine said in a letter describing his first impressions of the modern metropolis. No doubt, what Ruskin called the "beauty of memorial" is some compensation for the loss of the bright antique beauty which caused Pericles to say that his Athens "cheered the spirit and delighted the eye day by day." The world had never before seen anything as wonderful and august as the habitation he created for the Maiden Goddess, nor will ever see its like again. Other rich and proud cities had been content to crown their fortress-steeps with great buildings of grey stone, but the Parthenon was of flashing marble throughout, the purity of which, as of frozen moonshine, was emphasised by painted decorations, traces of which still remain. It was lifted on high above a sea of intense azure in a golden

atmosphere, which made every detail clear. Here was an apparition of wonderment indeed. The noble rock of the Acropolis, the wide, level platform of which had been extended and secured by the buttresses built by Cimon to support its southern cliff, was an unsurpassed setting for this crowning masterpiece of Greek architecture.

The intent of its Doric style was a dignified simplicity, but full scope was afforded for a display of the magnificent art of Pheidias and his fellow-workers. In the east and west gables were placed groups of statuary, representing at one end the birth of Athena from the head of Zeus and at the other the contest of the goddess with Poseidon for the possession of Attica. Beneath the roof, and above the row of pillars surrounding the shrine walls, ran at intervals a series of square "metopes" in which were placed two-figure groups of Lapiths and Centaurs fighting out their mythical combats. Finally, high up on the wall behind the pillars ran a frieze of figures in low relief portraying the procession of citizens at the Panathenæa. The grace and power of this temple's proportions and the strength and delicacy of its statuary made it the most impressive of those memorials of the brief flowering of Greek art (it lasted only

three generations!) which, even in their decay, do not compel us to ponder sadly on the past or be fearful for the future, but make us rejoice without dismay in all the beautiful gifts of the living present. When Renan stood on the Acropolis and gazed in wonderment at the great temple, he felt himself the recipient of a divine revelation. Remembering in tranquility the ecstasy he then experienced, he wrote: "The whole world seemed barbaric, the Orient shocked me by its ostentatious pomp and its impostures, while the majesty of the best Roman seemed only a pose compared with the ease and nobility of the citizen who could comprehend what made the beauty of the Parthenon."

This landmark in space and time was, like all other Greek temples, the abode of a deity, not a place of public worship. Pheidias, whose genius had already been displayed in a colossal bronze statue of Athena standing just inside the gates of the citadel, was chosen to repeat his triumphal work in far more precious materials, ivory for the flesh of the patron-goddess and gold for her draperies, while all the skill of the Greek metal-worker's art was lavished on her vast shield and towering helm. This chryselephantine



statue was the world's wonder, and during the century of Athenian supremacy "our Lady of Athens" (for she was truly a prototype of the true Queen of Heaven) received the tribute of her votaries from every part of the Greek world. Her more ancient rival, our Lady of Linus in Rhodes, for example, suffered sadly from the crowd-compelling competition of the occupant of the Parthenon. At Linus the priests could exhibit Helen's bracelet and Teucer's bow and other amazing antiques, which remind one of the relics in Roman Catholic churches, and they could tell the story of how Athena, when the citadel was closely invested by a Persian army and both besiegers and besieged were suffering from thirst, sent a timely thunderstorm which furnished the garrison with all the water they wanted, but did not provide the enemy with so much as a single raindrop. When the Athenians had to borrow Athena's golden raiment for war purposes, Pericles having arranged that each plate of precious metal should be easily detachable, the older shrine began to get some of its own back. Pericles' precaution illustrates the canniness of the Greeks even in matters of religion. And, strange to say, his plans failed to satisfy the superstitious side of

the Athenian mind, for which the sanctity of Athena's cult centred in a very old and uncouth wooden image of the goddess, that had once been housed in the temple destroyed by the Persians. When the pious and conservative Nicias was in power, the Erechtheum was built to receive it and to form, incidentally, in its exquisite Ionic style a perfect foil to the simple grandeur of the much larger Parthenon. And it was to the ugly idol in the Erechtheum, not to the ivory-and-gold colossus created by Pheidias, at the behest of Pericles, that the Athenian citizens made their annual pilgrimage of thanksgiving. What an American scholar once called "the curious incalculable cussedness of the Athenians" is well illustrated by such significant facts.

The squalor of the fifth-century city itself, as a modern observer would see it, was a strange contrast to the splendour of its temples in the sky. It was much more like the native quarters of an Oriental city such as Cairo or Calcutta than Oxford or Edinburgh. The streets were narrow and tortuous, unpaved, unlighted, filthy and full of evil smells. Sanitary arrangements, such as have been revealed by excavation in the palaces and hotels of Knossos, were undreamed of; sewers and even cesspools

were lacking. Even well-to-do citizens dwelt in mean mud-brick houses, and gardens were unknown, the area within the walls being restricted. There were no trained policemen ; the work of preserving order among excitable people was largely in the hands of barbarians, the laughing-stocks of free citizens.

In vain would a newly-arrived stranger have asked for the home address of an Athenian friend, seeing that the free citizen spent most of his time out of doors, using his house merely as a repository for his goods and chattels (including wife and children) and a place to eat and sleep in. If the latter was not engaged in running the Empire in the Assembly or acting as a juryman, he would have to be sought for in the market-place or in the shady back alleys given over to workshops. The market-place was a square, along two sides of which ran colonnades, on the inner walls of which were paintings in vivid colours of mythological battle-scenes or of wars with the Persians and other ancient enemies of Athens. Half the square was reserved for the public ; half for a chaos of stalls and booths, from which arose a babel of loud voices, engaged in haggling over the day's influx of flour, vegetables, fruit,

cheese, honey, garlic, fish, meat, and wine in pig-skins, or proclaiming the arrival of a cargo of luxuries. Precious perfumes from Asia were much sought after, soap being unknown. Even the well-to-do citizen would carry home his lunch in a cabbage leaf until it became the fashion to employ a slave. And he might have bread, hot from the oven, in the other hand—Socrates was once compared to a cottage loaf! The neighbouring slave-market was another favourite place of resort for strollers, especially if they were anxious to pick up a handywoman cheap or a handsome boy. Much more pleasant, according to modern notions, would be a stroll among the workshops, where you could watch the “artists” at work and have a chat with them. Socrates, a worker in stone himself, often frequented this quarter; Xenophon tells us how he visited in succession a painter, a sculptor and a breastplate-maker—in order to add to his store of homely illustrations of the advantage of knowing one’s job thoroughly, even if it were politics.

A modern visitor, once he became so accustomed to the dust and uproar and many discomforts of the city as to be able to enjoy its frank and vivid life, would

begin to note social features that seemed to him strange and even sinister. For example, however close his friendship with a free citizen, he would see nothing of his wife and daughters—not even when he was invited to dine at his house! The engrossing business of Athenian wives was “to save the hearth” by bearing and bringing up children; and to carry out their never-ending household duties, which included the making of all the fabrics required for clothes. There was no social intercourse between men and women of the ruling class, and the latter had no common meetings such as the former enjoyed every day. There were yearly festivals, such as the Thesmophoria, which they attended without male escort, and these seem to have been very lively affairs. They drove to the Eleusinian celebrations dressed in their best, and they also took part in the Pan-athenæa, when the daughters of the resident aliens carried their chairs and parasols behind them. But, except for these infrequent holidays, their domestic life was symbolised by Aphrodite Urania’s tortoise, which was always at home in its house. It was said that, as the door separating the women’s apartments from the rest of the house was the boundary set for a maiden,

so the street door was the boundary for a wife. They loved to stand by the windows of the upper storey (where their apartments were) and look down into the noisy, busy life of the street, from which they were excluded. Marriage was the only vocation for a free maiden, and as a rule she had put away childish things, dedicating her doll and ball to Artemis, by the age of fifteen and had entered on the secluded and incessant toil of wedded life. Her wedding-day was her greatest festival by far, since the natural emotions felt by a girl of to-day at her Confirmation were united with those that accompany the mystery of wedlock. That Athens honoured her wives and mothers, seeing in them the blest caryatides that held up the glorious fabric of the state, cannot be denied. Yet, motherhood was not revered as we revere it, and the Athenian wife had to share her husband's heart with others.

There were no "superfluous women" in Athens in normal times, and every marriageable maiden could be sure of a mate. After the destruction of the Sicilian Expeditionary Force, when the male population was so much reduced that all could not find husbands, a law was actually passed to sanction double marriages, and

Socrates himself took advantage of it. His second wife was a destitute widow, named Myrto, daughter of a full citizen and grand-daughter of Aristides, and though we have no definite information, we can guess what sort of thinking aloud was done by the hot-tempered, sharp-tongued Xanthippe, when the new bride arrived. But the numerical equality of the sexes was maintained by methods which are utterly repugnant to the modern mind. Greek opinion always countenanced the exposure of infants, especially female infants, and the mother's feelings were seldom or never considered, if the father decided for any reason—for example, the difficulty of providing a dowry in the future—that a newly-born child should not receive the right to live, by being solemnly presented to the family and admitted to its membership. When it was decided that an infant was not to be "nourished," it was put into a cradle or a pot and exposed in some public place. Aristophanes writes of this cruel custom as a quite natural thing; Menander's plays are full of references to it; and the following letter from the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, though written at a much later date, when, however, there was even less room for an expanding

population, indicates the father's attitude :

“ I beg and beseech you to take care of the  
“ little child, and, as soon as we receive  
“ wages, I will send them to you. When—  
“ good luck to you!—you bear offspring,  
“ if it is a boy, let it live ; if it is a girl,  
“ expose it.”

Evidently the writer, who was working away from home, was a considerate husband and a kind father according to the light vouchsafed to him. The poor mother would hope that the victim of “ pot-exposure ” might be rescued by some benevolent passer-by, which happened often in plays, but very seldom indeed in actual life. An evening stroll in Athens would be spoilt for the modern visitor if, as might easily occur, he heard the cries of a starving infant issuing from an earthen pot deposited by a wrestling ground or at the entrance to a temple. There was a suspicious lack of girls in some of the best-known Athenian families. Thus Cimon, Pericles and Socrates himself, each had three sons, but no daughter.

The contempt thus shown for motherhood, its pathos and its pangs, must have been a factor in the growing discontent of free women with their social position which



is heard, or at any rate overheard, in all the plays of Euripides. They had served the city well by giving her the men she needed; and Medea had once for all disposed of the argument that a woman cannot die for her country when she says in her play that it is easier to stand thrice under a shield in the line of battle than to bear a child once. Moreover, in case of need, Greek women had manned the walls of a beleaguered city; only giving the secret of their sex away to the besiegers when, as Æneas Tacticus found out in a subsequent age, they showed they did not know how to throw things. Yet, despite their unremitting service and self-sacrifice, they were excluded from social amenities as well as from political life. Nay more, husbands would even settle domestic problems without asking the opinion of their wives; and Xenophon, pro-Spartan in all his sympathies and so inclined to allow women freedom approaching that enjoyed by the Homeric ladies, tells us how Socrates rebuked a friend for his folly in not discussing home affairs with the home-keeping expert. In Xenophon's story of a Socratic dinner-party, moreover, the joys of wedded love are celebrated almost in the spirit of an eighteenth-

century novelist. It was the alien-born woman, coming from the freer life of the Ionian cities or of the islands, who was accepted as an intimate adviser in philosophic, artistic, and even political discussions and shared with handsome youths the delights of romantic love. In his Funeral Oration, Pericles gives a word of advice to the war widows present: "Great will be your glory if you do not lower the nature that is in you—hers most of all whose praise or blame is not bruited abroad on the lips of men." Yet this "Olympian" speaker, as every woman present must have remembered, had Aspasia for his mistress and confidante in public and private affairs. The ecstatic friendships of men, which are met with at every turn in Plato's dramatised discussions and were such an important part of Socrates' social life, must be discussed hereafter. But when we note how the Athenian wife was losing the devotion which she had earned so well in two directions, we can appreciate the full significance of Medea's cry of fighting feminism:—

"And woman, yea, woman shall be terrible in story:

The tales, too, meseemeth shall be other than of yore.

For a fear there is that cometh out of women and  
a glory,  
And the hard hating voices shall encompass her  
no more.<sup>1</sup>

To-day Athens and the Piræus form a huge modern capital which, owing to the disintegration of the Turkish Empire and the decline of Constantinople (like post-war Vienna, a "severed head") is the foremost city of the Near East. This new Metropolis of the Greek race has at least a million inhabitants and, because of the width of its streets and the rarity of sky-scrapers<sup>2</sup> or even of three-storied buildings, occupies a larger area than Paris. Thus the prophecy of Shelley that "Another Athens shall arise," has been fulfilled in a way undreamed of by those who knew the Turkish Athens of the poet's lifetime, when a traveller walked round its still standing walls in forty-seven minutes. Despite this prodigious growth, some of the peculiarities of the ancient Athens have been retained. Thus *solvitur ambulando* is still a dangerous principle for the visitor, seeing that some of the modern league-long roads are as badly kept as

<sup>1</sup> *Medea*, 410 pp Gilbert Murray's translation.

<sup>2</sup> In the still plastic Greek of to-day *ouranoxystes*, a word worthy of Aristophanes.

those which Socrates trod, and the gracious moon is still the belated reveller's only guiding light.

Again, Athens has always been a city where the opening line of Pindar's first ode, "Water is best," has always had a special significance for its more or less parched inhabitants. The dust which is the modern "plague of Athens," and the fact that it is even now a civic crime to leave a tap running, recall the legislation of Solon, which included strict regulations for the use of public wells and compelled citizens to search for springs. And among modern plans for improving the Athenian water-supply is the suggestion of Professor Aiginetes, the famous meteorologist, that water could be obtained by digging trenches at the foot of the Attic mountains and in the dry beds of the Attic torrents—an idea at least as old as Plato, who advocated similar work in the "Laws"!

The people of modern Athens, moreover, have the same insatiable passion for talking politics which made Aristotle's definition of man as a "political animal" more applicable to the ancient Athenians than to the citizens of any other Greek city. "Just as Englishmen open a conversation by a remark about the weather," observes

the highest living authority<sup>1</sup> on the Greece that was, is, and will be, "so in Greece the question, 'What is your view on the situation?' is a quite usual beginning. In towns and villages, in clubs and monasteries, politics form the most frequent theme of conversation. To people with acute minds and a love of dialectics public affairs have always been a favourite subject for discussions. Ancient Athens was intensely political; in Roman Athens, where there were no politics, University questions took their place, and parties rallied round this or that celebrated professor, just as in medieval Byzantium they discussed theology; and to-day in the Dodekanese the ordinary people, cut off from politics, are keenly interested in the question whether or no the Church shall be autocephalous. Even in the Turkish days, as travellers have recorded, there were parties in the then small world of Christian Athens, and with the dawn of freedom, and still more after the abolition of the Bavarian autocracy by the September revolution of 1843, politics became an all-engrossing topic." It is true, as the same authority avers, that there has been a decline in

<sup>1</sup> In Dr. William Miller's *Greece* (Ernest Benn, 1928), a work to which I am greatly indebted.

political interest among the young people in recent years. The rising generation has seen so many and such drastic political changes that they are becoming tired of of the daily dose of politics, without which their elders suffer from mental congestion ; a sort of suppressed gout of the spirit making for irritability. Athens, now a vast cosmopolitan centre, as well as the mother-city of the Greeks from every part of the world, provides numerous non-political diversions which did not exist in the Othonian or even in the Georgian times. Social functions are numerous, and the emancipation of women has added a new zest to them, now that they no longer herd together in one corner of a room and the men in another. (Many of the Athenian ladies now take a keen interest in the personal aspects of politics.) "Dancings," as dance-halls are styled in Greek slang, have sprung up in every quarter ; horse-racing, which was started by the Philippic society, in 1883, is now an institution, some of the owners being women ; football, tennis and golf have become acclimatised ; and everybody, of course, goes to the pictures. Again, the growth of Greek industries, by providing more profitable careers than place-hunting, has somewhat

diminished the number of loquacious minor politicians. None the less, politics are still the principal subject of casual conversations and, as in the days of Socrates, the person who is not conversant with the rapidly-turning kaleidoscope of public affairs is suspected of a lack of patriotism. And, as in ancient times, an intense individualism<sup>1</sup> and the belief that every statesman, however overburdened by work must be easily attainable at all times, are still all-important factors in the average Athenian's estimate of public personages. When Cleon, as reported by Thucydides, said that "he, and not the other fellow, ought to be general," he expressed an eternal characteristic of Greek politicians, great and small, ancient or modern. And the following anecdote, told by Dr. Miller, illustrates the modern Athenian's democratic nature and his fondness for talking on equal terms with the man who is governing him. George I, most democratic of sovereigns, recognised this trait in his subjects' character and liked to gratify it. Meeting a republican deputy whose programme was the erection of three gallows in Constitution Square—one for the King, one for Trikoupes, and one for Deligiannes

<sup>1</sup> *atomismos* in modern Greek.

—he asked him affably if he still wished to hang him. “Certainly, your Majesty,” was the reply, “as long as you remain on the throne. If you abdicate and become a Republican, I shall become your closest friend!”

If Socrates could revisit his beloved city, he might be a little perturbed at first by its monstrous growth and by the menacing cries (like those of a barbarian army in action) of the swarming motor-cars. But he would soon feel at home among the modern Athenians. I can imagine him at an *Oûzo* party, consuming large quantities of the spirit so named and setting out to convince his fellow-guests that modern inventions had added nothing to man’s sum of happiness. By precept and by practice he would teach the salutary doctrine of plain living and high thinking. A modern observer, if he could borrow Mr. H. G. Wells’s time-machine for a trip to fifth-century Athens, would probably take much longer to become accustomed to his new environment. He would be shocked at the ubiquitous use of slave-labour—until he discovered that the Athenian slaves were so well treated, so much a part of the social life of the community, that they were indistinguishable in dress or manner from



free citizens and their womenfolk. To the Spartans, to the Macedonian conquerors, to the Romans, to all subsequent slave-owners down to the Southern cotton-planters before the American Civil War, the slave was a human chattel, placed by his nature half-way between free mankind and the beasts that perish. According to Aristotle, who interpreted the facts of life as he saw them, "the lower sort of mankind are by nature slaves, and it is better for them, as for all inferiors, that they should be under the rule of a master. For he who can be, and therefore is, the property of another, and he who has a sufficient share in reason to apprehend, but not to have reason, is a slave by nature." The very same argument was often put forth in sermons preached by Southern clergymen when the voice of the Abolitionist became audible in the North. The fifth-century Athenian, however, took a much more humane view of slavery, though he accepted it as an inevitable institution. To him the slave was at any rate so much a man like himself that the best way to get good work out of him was to allow him, nay, encourage him, to become alike in speech and appearance to the free men about him. Except in the

silver-mines of Laureion, where they toiled in chains and almost naked, the work being carried on night and day, the Athenian slaves were treated with great consideration. So much so that a writer of the period, known as the "Old Oligarch," says that "in order that we may get in our slave-rents, we must perforce be slaves to our slaves, and let the real slave go free."

Our modern visitor would probably discuss the whole question of slavery with one of his Athenian acquaintances and get from him an explanation of the comfortable life of the 80,000 slaves in Athens, where it was a legal offence to strike them and they would not step aside to allow a free citizen to pass them in the street. "It is a strange story you have been telling me of your wonderful city beyond the Pillars of Hercules," the Athenian would say, who happened to be a disciple of Socrates, "and it reminds me of the lost Atlantis—only your city is situated in the years to come and not in the years that have been. When we fall in with Socrates, he will be as eager to hear about your beloved London as he was to be told about Atlantis at a festival by the young men whose great-grandfather, Dropidas, had it from the sagacious Solon. It is hard to conceive

a city such as you describe where everybody is free and takes a part in governing it, even women being allowed to vote and to take office. Surely, your Englishmen must be as sadly henpecked as the lords of Lacedæmon are by their ladies. And you must have in your great city many a Menelaus, whose wife plays the part of Helen, though possibly less beautiful than the Homeric heroine and even less easily recovered. But let us reserve these strange matters for further and fuller discussion when we find Socrates. He is always willing to learn, believing that the Oracle declared him the wisest of living men because he was most conscious of his ignorance.

“As touching our treatment of slaves, should we not be foolish to spoil our property by treating them worse than our beasts of burden? We often set them to work without supervision, and to make all manner of beautiful things, and this they will not or cannot do without a measure of happiness. It is possible, so the superintendents say at Laureion, for a strong man to die of unhappiness. Moreover, ‘the poet’<sup>1</sup> has taught us to be sorry for war prisoners, for the man

<sup>1</sup> Homer.

who is sold into slavery and so loses half his manhood and for the women and children he can no longer protect from injury and the shame which is a wound in the spirit and as incurable as Philoctetes' poisoned foot. Our playwrights have shown us the hard lot of Hecuba and Andromache and many other innocent persons, and have taught us to be merciful to the captives working in our houses and on our farms. And having honoured the playwright's genius with a libation of tears, we have left the theatre still remembering the last words of the chorus :

' There be many stages of mystery,  
And many things God makes to be  
Past hope or fear.  
And the end men looked for cometh not,  
And a path is there where no man thought,  
So hath it fallen here.'

“ Besides, it is conceivable that any Hellene may fall into slavery as a result of a defeat in war, which, if he has fought well, is ill-fortune, not his fault. Cease to wonder, then, stranger, that we Athenians are more merciful to our slaves than the Spartans or than servants of the Great King, though even his satraps are in a sense slaves of their autocratic master.”

Our visitor would find himself treated with a genial and distinguished courtesy. It was the traditional policy of ancient Athens, as it was of Corinth, to welcome strangers of good repute, to tolerate their apparent eccentricities, and to accept them willingly as "metics" who shared many of the privileges and responsibilities of full citizenship. The Athenian metics were not a despised class of immigrant labourers, such as exists in so many modern cities, but skilled craftsmen and small traders and well-to-do merchants who were "not burdensome nor in any way objectionable to the state," as King Adrastus in the *Suppliants* of Euripides, says of the model metic included in a little portrait-gallery of Athenian types. They were fellow-workers for the greatness of their adopted city, and in many cases may have been more Athenian than the Athenians themselves. Indeed, they were so well liked and so proud of their position that the difficulty is to explain why they were excluded from full citizenship, especially when it is remembered that they served in the Navy and in the Army and made the same "liturgies" of free gifts as their hosts.

In the immortal Funeral Speech of Pericles, which is given by Thucydides in

his wonderful history of the Peloponnesian War, and reads as if the historian had dipped a pen in his heart's blood to write it, this policy of the "open door" is nobly vindicated. "The gates of our city," the great statesman is made to say, "are flung open to the world. We practise no periodical deportations, nor do we prevent our visitors from observing or discovering what an enemy might usefully apply to his own purposes. For we place our trust not in the devices of material equipment, but in our own good spirits for the fray." In Sparta and many other Greek cities an unusual stranger, such as our visitor from another time and clime, would have been under grave suspicion of espionage and, if allowed to remain, would have been rigorously shepherded. Moreover, a tolerant courtesy was the rule of social life in Athens. "Our constitution is called a democracy," we read in the speech, "because it is in the hands not of the few, but of the many. But our laws secure equal justice for all in their private disputes, and our public opinion welcomes talent and honours it in every sphere of achievement, not for any sectional reason, but solely on grounds of excellence. And, giving as we do, free play to all in public affairs, we

carry the same spirit into our daily relations with one another. We have no black looks or angry words for our neighbour if he enjoys himself in his own way, and we abstain from the little acts of churlishness which, though they leave no mark, yet cause annoyance to anybody who notices them." So for these and other good reasons Athenian statesmen thought Athens was "the school of Greece," and, certainly, nobody came there who did not learn manners.

No doubt our English visitor would sadly miss many of the aids to easy living which make up so much of modern civilisation so-called. He would have to dispense with railways and motor 'buses, telegraphs and telephones, electric lamps and gas stoves, clocks and watches, tea and coffee, newspapers and advertisements. He would have to live in a house without drains or water laid on from the main, sleep in a bed without sheets and springs, warm himself over a pot of ashes, and judge open-air tragedies and legal cases in wintry weather. The life and literature of ancient Greece—and, in particular, the career of Socrates—form an obvious protest against the modern theory that to be comfortable is to be civilised. The visitor would, in

the end, be convinced that the modern inventions and appliances which prompted Emerson's lines :

“ Things are in the saddle  
And ride mankind ”

are not really necessary, and that true comfort (such as that promised in the “ comfortable words ” of the Gospels) is a state of the soul. Then, and not till then, would he be able to enjoy his intercourse with a frugal race, the members of which were “ lovers of beauty without extravagance ” and set honour and steadfastness and esteem far above riches, thinking more of the wisdom of their guardian goddess, Athena, than of her “ owls ”—those beautiful silver coins minted from the silver of Laureion, which were acceptable currency throughout the Mediterranean world and nowhere more so than in Sparta.<sup>1</sup>

After a time he would feel as if he were living in a great university to which women students were not admitted. Even to-day, at Oxford and Cambridge, though they are

<sup>1</sup> When the Spartan commander, Gylippus, kept back some of the state booty after Aegospotami, and hid it under his roof-tiles, the man who denounced him said there were “ owls in the potters' quarter ”.



no longer "unisexual paradises," to use Dean Burgon's phrase in a conversation with the author's father, the conversation of the undergraduates and of the younger Fellows must be as virile and various as that of the free citizens of a Greek city. It is true the former discuss sport, where the latter would be concerned with war and the training for it. But in the era of Greek "neighbour-wars" campaigning was still an amateur sport, which had very much the same appeal to the adventurous as the hunting of tigers or lions has to-day, and the young Athenians marched against their temporary enemies, even of their own race, in the spirit of Julian Grenfell's immortal *Into Battle* :

"The fighting man shall from the sun  
Take warmth, and life from the glowing earth ;  
Speed with the light-foot winds to run,  
And with the trees to newer birth ;  
And find, when fighting shall be done,  
Great rest, and fullness after dearth.  
All the bright company of Heaven  
Hold him in their high comradeship,  
The Dog-Star and the Sisters Seven,  
Orion's Belt and sworded hip."

The Greek conception of the happy warrior, before war was professionalised and mercenary armies appeared, was vividly

revived in this and other remarkable war-poems by the young scholars and athletes who died for England in the first two years of the struggle with Germany, of which the Peloponnesian War was an exact prototype on a tiny scale. In discussing warfare with his Athenian friends, our English visitor would soon find himself listening to very familiar arguments; for example, whenever the advantages of naval power, an inevitable outcome of extensive overseas trading, were eloquently enforced.

When war—and the policy of which it is but a prolongation—ceased to be the engrossing topic, little time would be wasted on personal gossip. The ancient Athenians were not particularly interested in other people's domestic affairs; they would certainly have refused to waste their obols on a journal, could such a thing have been produced without printing-presses, full of society chit-chat. They much preferred to talk about poetry and philosophy, and our English visitor would find them every whit as willing as a group of young adventurers in thought at Oxford or St. Andrews to sit up half the night in order to settle a problem of literary criticism (Is Sophocles a better dramatist than Æschylus?) or of metaphysics or

morals. Philosophy, like the olive-tree, has always grown by moonlight.

When a solution could not be agreed upon, somebody would be sure to say: "Let us ask Socrates about it." And the English visitor, who had heard so much about him—panegyrics from the young men, uncomplimentary comments such as we hear about "intellectuals" from some of their elders—would eagerly join in an immediate search for the master. Perhaps they would begin by visiting his humble abode, and, when they knocked at the door, hear an angry voice from within (poor Xanthippe's) bidding them begone, since Socrates had not come home. Then, it may be, they would draw some of the coverts in which he and the inevitable party of disciples and disputants might be found.

But ancient Athens was all one huge men's club, and Socrates had so many places of call, where he would be warmly welcomed, that the nocturnal quest would probably be a failure. It would be resumed next morning with a better chance of success, and the sage would be run down and taken prisoner with the affectionate laying-on of hands, either in the market-place or in a plot of ground reserved for

wrestling and other athletic exercises or in one of the many colonnades or covered walks which every large Greek city possessed.<sup>1</sup>

The English visitor, despite having seen busts and pictures of him, would be taken aback at the man's uncouthness and at once acknowledge the justice of Alcibiades' saying, when the wine was in and truth came out: "You might very well liken Brasides or Pericles to Achilles or Nestor or other heroes of ancient times, but here is one who can be compared with nobody save Silenus or one of his satyrs." Square, squat, strong in build, and corpulent in spite of abstemiousness verging on austerity; thick face-bones, the angularities of which were not hidden by the covering of flesh; snub nose with wide nostrils; thick lips, straight wire-like hair and an unkempt beard; protruding eyes which had a bull-like glare at times—a form that might have been rough-hewn out of rock, a face which bore the signs of fleshly passions long since subdued. "Not

<sup>1</sup> Strabo tells us how the citizens of Cyme pledged their colonnades for a state debt and, when they could not pay up, were prohibited from walking and talking in them. When it rained, however, the creditors were so ashamed of the city's plight that the town crier was sent to remove the embargo.

the sort of fellow to meet in a lonely lane by night," the English visitor would say to himself. But when he spoke, and the ugly face was transfigured with light and delight from within, the expression, "beauty of holiness" would be recalled. And then, indeed, the truth of the further words of Alcibiades would be manifest: "I say that he exactly resembles those masks of Silenus which may be seen in the statuaries' shops, standing with pipes and flutes in their mouths; and they are made to open in the middle and have images of gods inside. When we have any other speaker, even a really good orator, his words have no effect at all on us in comparison; whereas mere fragments of you and your discourse at second-hand, however imperfectly repeated, astonish and possess the souls of every man, woman and child who comes within earshot. I have listened to Pericles and other famous orators, but, though I thought they spoke well, they never gave me a similar feeling; my soul was not stirred by them, nor did they make me angry at the thought of my slavish condition. But this Marsyas has often brought me to such a pass that I have felt as though I could hardly endure the life I was leading; and I am conscious that

if I did not shut my ears against him and flee from the siren voice, he would keep me till I grew old sitting at his feet."

## I

THERE was a tradition that Anytus and Meletus, Socrates' prosecutors, bribed Aristophanes to attack their enemy on the stage, and that the *Clouds* was a *ballon d'essai* launched to discover whether public opinion was ripe for a legal indictment. This explanation of the origin of the comedy, which was produced twenty-four years before the philosopher's actual trial, is as unnecessary as it is uncharitable. Anytus, at any rate, was an honest man, and there is no reason to believe that the playwright was corruptible. Moreover, in his *Symposium*, Plato shows us Socrates and Aristophanes meeting as friends, and Alcibiades actually quotes a passage from the *Clouds* as giving a glimpse of Socrates exactly as he had seen him with his own eyes. Aristophanes, whose mission it was to hold his distorting mirror up to each passing craze and strive to kill by ridicule what seemed to him unfitting, would, naturally, have a hit at the sophists and their precocious patrons. Just so a modern

satirist might poke fun at Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. H. G. Wells and the young "intellectuals" who accept them as major prophets. And, just as Mr. Bernard Shaw would be chosen as the chief mark for satire because of his picturesque appearance and partiality for greengrocer's stuff, so Socrates' odd exterior and predilection for living on air inevitably made him the principal butt in Aristophanes' full-blooded burlesque. Two peculiarities of the Old Comedy of Athens are repugnant to modern tastes: the libellous attacks on living persons and the fact that the *jeune premier* is not allowed to come out on top. Aristophanes lived to see the rule of no personalities on the stage in operation, but it is only since Menander's New Comedy came into fashion that ingenuous youth has always had the better of crabbed age.

There was, of course, a vein of seriousness in Aristophanes' amusing attack on Socrates and his disciples. The playwright himself detested the perpetual criticism of old-fashioned ideas of religion and morality which tended to make the younger generation dissatisfied with the simple faith of the stout old heroes of Marathon and Salamis. So he became the mouthpiece of conservative opinion, and his plays



always appealed to that middle-class gallery which supports the established order, looks on religion as a vested interest, hates "intellectuals" like poison, and thinks the ascetic a sort of heretic because he will not eat and drink his fill (as Spurgeon said he smoked) to the glory of God. The views of himself and his patrons as to the futility of philosophy as a vocation are vigorously expounded by Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*, when he says: "It (philosophy) is a laudable and proper study in a lad, for then only is he really free; without such study he will be illiberal, and can never aspire to anything fair or noble; but an older man who will still be philosophising seems to me, Socrates, to deserve corporal punishment. For, as I said just now, such a man, be he ever such a genius, must of necessity lose his manliness—he will shun the centres and public places of the city where, as the poet says, men win fair renown; he sneaks away and lives all his life whispering to three or four lads in a corner; he never utters any liberal, great, or satisfactory sentiment. . . . Nay, Sir, be ruled by me; cease from your quibbles; study skill in action; strive to win a name for sound common sense; leave to others these subtleties (chatter or folly, call it which you will)

which will but make your dwelling desolate ; and emulate, instead of your choppers of paltry logic, men who have substance and reputation and many other good things.”<sup>1</sup> Aristophanes thought like that, and his profound contempt for the “ poor devils ” of philosophers, who could not accumulate goods and gear and the respect of neighbours like other decent, canny bodies, makes the atmosphere of the *Clouds*. There is nothing of Swift’s savage rancour in this wonderful burlesque, with its passages of exalted lyric poetry, and I feel sure that Socrates, who had a keen sense of humour, must have been amused at the reflection of himself in the dramatist’s turning mirror.

Aristophanes does not even spare the conservative types of Athenian society, and Strepsiades, the “ heavy father ” of his play, is an absurd specimen of the stupid rustic old gentleman, familiar in every time and clime, who can only receive new ideas through his pocket. He has heard that there are clever fellows at Athens who can teach you how to get out of paying your debts, and he begs his son Pheidippides, an irrepressible chump who has been

<sup>1</sup> Translated by the late A. D. Godley in *Socrates and Athenian Society* The verse translations are by the same skilled hand

wasting his father's money on horse-racing, to go and learn this secret of the sophists. Here Aristophanes is having a sly hit at the fathers who disapprove of the sophists' doctrines, but think a course will help their sons to get on in the world. Says the old man, whose religious and moral scruples vanish at the jingle of easy money :—

“ I hear they have two Reasons—one the better  
(Whatever that may mean), and one the worse ;  
The worse of these two Reasons, so they say,  
Puts forward unjust pleas, and always wins.  
Now, if you were to learn this unjust reasoning,  
Of all the debts that I've incurred for you  
I would not pay one creditor one penny.”

But Pheidippides is not having any more school, so Strepsiades has to resort to the “ Thinking Shop ” himself. He finds Socrates swinging suspended in a basket (“ I walk on air, and contemplate the sun,” he explains) while the disciples lie grovelling on their faces. The old rustic proposes to become a pupil and is ready to swear by the gods that he will pay whatever fee Socrates demands. Strepsiades is duly initiated, a pallet-bed being used in place of the sacred tripod, and when he is told to put on a crown, he is terribly frightened :

“ A crown ? What’s the crown for ? Ah, Socrates, Don’t sacrifice me, like poor Athamas.”

He is told to keep silence while the Master invokes the Clouds, fitting deities to inspire the nebulous speculations of sophists. Clouds mean wet weather to the old countryman, and he is afraid of a drenching :

“ Not yet, not yet—I’m afraid of the wet—  
let me first put a mantle or wrap on :  
To think from my home I have ventured,  
to come without even as much as a cap on.”

It was only while travelling that a cap was worn in Athens. When the poetical invocation has been said and sung, the chorus of the nebulous deities is heard in the distance, and presently they are seen coming over the heights of Parnes, which are visible, of course, from the Athenian open-air theatre. They appear there as a company of women who do not look like clouds to Strepsiades, “ for these creatures,” he says, “ have got noses.” Socrates explains why they have assumed a female form, and goes on to say that they are the only deities he acknowledges ; all the rest, including Zeus himself, are merely lies and legends.

Eventually Strepsiades is accepted as a pupil and, pleased but perturbed, disappears into the Thinking Shop. But he is far too dense to learn anything, gives ridiculous answers to Socrates, and is dismissed as a stupid, forgetful, wretched old dunce.

*Str.* : Alas, poor me ! What's going to happen now ?

It's ruin for me not to learn how to quibble.

O Clouds, I beseech you, give me your advice.

*Chorus* : Our counsel, ancient Sir, is simply this :  
If you've a son who's come to man's estate,

Send him along to learn instead of you.

*Str.* . Yes, I've a son, a real gentleman :  
But he won't learn : so what am I to do ?

*Chorus* : What ! You stand his nonsense ?

*Str.* : He's stout and lusty—

His mother's folk are real society people.

Still, I'll go and get him—and if he won't come,

I'll turn him out of the house, indeed I will !

Go in, Socrates, please ; I'll be back directly.

There follows an argument between the

stage personifications of Just Reason and Unjust Reason as to which shall have the privilege of teaching Pheidippides. Just Reason is identified with the old spirit of plain living and rigorous discipline, which made the man who defeated the Persians and laid the foundations of Athens' greatness. Unjust Reason, on the other hand, is the modern do-as-you-like spirit which scoffs at the old social traditions and pays too much attention to personal comfort. They might be characters in a mediæval mystery play. Just Reason eloquently praises the old-fashioned system of bringing up boys:—

“ Now first you must know, in the days long ago, how we brought up our youngsters and schooled them ;

When to argument just 'twas the fashion to trust, and when Virtue and Modesty ruled them.

Little boys—'twas averred—must be seen and not heard ; and to school they must go all together ;

Unprotected by coats, or by wraps for their throats, in the coldest and snowiest weather.

Where they learnt to repeat, in a posture discreet, all the ancient respectable ditties, Such as ‘ Sound of the war that is borne from afar,’ or ‘ Pallas, the sacker of cities ’ ;

And to render with care the traditional air, without any newfangled vagary .

If you played the buffoon, or the simple old  
tune if you tried to embellish or vary.  
And to show off your skill in a shake or a trill,  
or in modern fantastical ruses—  
All you got by your trick was a touch of the  
stick, for the outrage you did to the Muses ”

Consent to be trained on these lines (says Just Reason) and you will live virtuously, doing nothing base, and being always fresh and fit, because you will prefer the exercises of the palæstra or sport under the Academe's olive trees to the practice of rhetoric or the cozening contentions of the law courts. But Unjust Reason easily proves that these methods and ideals are obsolete, and eventually carries off Pheidippides as a pupil. Being quicker in the uptake than his father, the young man soon reappears, with all the wisdom of the sophists at his tongue's tip, and able to arm the old man with arguments to baffle his creditors. So far, so good, unfortunately, Strepsiades discovers that the attempt to combine the newfangled Socratic ideas with those of his own generation produces an highly explosive mixture. After dinner the old man asked his son to play and sing one of the good old songs, the *Ram* of Simonides, and Pheidippides flatly refused: firstly, because it was no longer good form to ask anybody

but a slave-girl to sing at table, and, secondly, because Simonides was destitute of poetic merit. Asked to recite some Æschylus, the sophisticated young man again refused on the score that Æschylus was no poet, but merely a bombastic blusterer, full of sound and fury. Controlling his choler, Strepsiades asked his son to recite something written in his precious modern style, and when the latter reeled off a story from Euripides (another favourite butt of Aristophanes and his bourgeois gallery), which really wasn't decent, an altercation began and in the end the son gave his father a good hiding.

Pheidippides is not in the least ashamed of his conduct. He actually proposes to convince Strepsiades—in the best manner of Euripides—that a son has a perfect right to thrash his father; nay, more, that it is sometimes his duty to do so:

“Then, if you say to beat a child is merely human nature—

An aged man's a child again, of rather larger stature:

And all the more he needs the rod, for when you catch him tripping,

He has not the excuse of youth to save him from a whipping”



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## *Socrates and His Friends*

---

"But everywhere 'tis held a crime—by no  
~~A tradition~~ backed 'tis!"

"Well, ~~it was~~ a man in days of old who  
penalised the practice,

Just a mere man, like you or me, his fellows  
who persuaded,

And if I make another law, I simply do what  
they did

If they passed bills for beating sons then  
surely I should gather

That I've a right to pass a bill for sons to beat  
their father,

Though, 'spite the stripes we sons received  
ere this my legislation,

We don't propose to claim arrears, nor ask for  
compensation."

Pheidippides proceeds to prove by the same arguments that he has a right to beat his mother, and that is too much for his father. The latter blames the Clouds for having encouraged him to go to school with Socrates, and they reply that his infatuation was a providential arrangement to bring home to him the folly of the new ideas, which are corrupting Athenian life. Assured that his misfortunes were meant for his good, he is left to get out of his difficulties as best he can. So he sets fire to the Thinking Shop, which is an excellent curtain for a most diverting play.

Several commentators have taken the

*Clouds* as an important source of information about the life and character of Socrates. One might as well seek for social biography in the long-forgotten entertainments produced in the days when "the Sacred Lamp of Burlesque" was burning brightly at the Gaiety Theatre. A caricature may be a portrait, revealing traits in a character which are overlooked by hero-worshippers. But in this case we are merely shown the philosopher as he was seen by the *homme moyen sensuel*, to whom the creative artist or thinker is never a hero.

Aristophanes had a reasonable excuse for utilising this popular misconception to make a popular play. He was the apostle of the *status quo*; he had no faith at all in what we call progress; his answer to all reformers, religious, social or intellectual, was Melbourne's: "Why not let it alone?" Though a professed pacifist, he did not understand that the social laxity and political decadence, of which he saw signs on every side, were the outcome of a ruthless war that had long since lost all moral significance. So he laid the blame for a national loss of morale on the one man whose questionings were directed to rebuilding a shattered society on new and stronger foundations of truth, justice, and

goodness. He mistook the shadow for the substance, as the world did in the modern "myth" of Peter Schlemyl, which, surely, would have pleased Plato. We are indebted to him for a portrait of Socrates as the average Athenian saw him—just as we are to Shakespeare for a similar and similarly-written picture of Joan of Arc!

## II

It is strange that Xenophon should have been so often accused of belittling the character and method of Socrates. Scholars of repute have complained that the historian's portrait of his revered master in the *Memorabilia* is that of a pretentious bore, a mere purveyor of platitudes and frivolous matters. Had his conversation been such as is reputed in that book of reminiscences, these authorities assure us, he would have deserved the blows and kicks which, according to the Chronicle of Diogenes Laertius, were sometimes provoked by his philosophic examinations. They go on to offer us a choice of two alternatives—either Xenophon made Socrates a mere mouthpiece for his own

crude opinions, or else a large portion of the *Memorabilia* was the work of a later and less skilful hand.

The first of these alternatives underrates the intelligence of Xenophon, who was an excellent example of the versatile Athenian. A man of the world, a man of action, and also a man of letters, he resembles the brilliant personages produced by the Renaissance, both in Italy and in England. Our Elizabethans greatly admired him for his courtesy and gentleness (seen in his kindness to slaves and animals), the genius for handling all sorts and conditions of men, shown in his military adventures, his thoroughness and inventiveness, his love and knowledge of open-air sport, his philosophic patience in exile, the strain of euphuism in his writings and his foreshadowing of the modern art of biography. "For Xenophon," says Sir Philip Sidney, "who did imitate so excellently as to give us *effigiem justi imperii*, the portraiture of a just empire under the name of Cyrus (as Cicero saith of him) made therein an absolute heroicall poem," and the chorus of commendation which thus began closed in Milton's panegyric that placed him on an equality with Plato. It is, perhaps, because the *Anabasis* is made the school-

boy's painful introduction to Greek literature that, the "Attic bee," as he was styled by ancient critics, is now generally supposed to be a dull and "facy" writer. But the famous German professor who said to Dakyns, his best translator: "Yes, the Attic bee—but I do not like his buzzing!" could never have read his works which, as the late Andrew Lang once told me in conversation, "could only have been written by a soldier and a scholar and a sportsman."

He was brought up to pay as much attention to bodily health as to his soul's welfare, and his motto: "Nothing without sweat" reminds one of Theodore Roosevelt's, "Sweat and be saved." In his tract on Hunting, which is Jorrocksian in its enthusiasm, he insists that "the first efforts of a youth emerging from boyhood should be directed to the institution of the chase," which he regarded as the best possible training for war and also for "all else of which the issue is perfection in thought, word and deed." Even to-day you will find in the Shires and elsewhere men of sterling character who thus believe that fox-hunting is a nursery of all the virile virtues. His love of horses inspires his treatise on cavalry and its uses in

campaigning, which was carefully studied by the famous commanders of classical antiquity.

If he had written nothing else, his *Anabasis* would have given him a secure place among the literary immortals. It is a masterpiece of military history. When Cyrus decided to try and deprive his hated elder brother of the Persian throne, he collected a force of 11,000 Greek hoplites, besides a few light-armed troops, in which almost every part of the Greek world was represented, to form the backbone of his huge Asiatic army. Xenophon served as a volunteer without a commission in the small contingent from Athens. It was a three months' march to Cunaxa, where the necessity of protecting Babylon compelled the Persian king to offer battle. His unwieldly and motley host, 400,000 strong, was virtually defeated when Cyrus, moved by an impulse of passion at the sight of his brother, threw away his life in a foolish, impetuous, single-handed charge. As so often happens in Asiatic warfare, his native army ceased to exist as soon as the news of the commander's death was known, and when the victorious Ten Thousand returned from annihilating the Persian left wing, they found themselves isolated in the heart

of a hostile country a thousand miles from the nearest Greek settlement. Their prowess had created such an impression that nobody dared attack them, and Tissaphernes made them an offer of safe conduct to the Black Sea littoral. This unscrupulous representative of the Great King summoned the five Greek commanders to a parley in his pavilion, where they were seized and sent to the Persian Court for execution. But the Ten Thousand, being a democracy under arms, did not collapse or surrender, but held a mass-meeting to discuss the situation and elect new commanders, of whom Xenophon soon proved himself the most vigorous and resourceful.

The retreat northward was a dreadful ordeal, and it is described by the chief leader in a pithy, picturesque narration which is the best soldier's journal ever written. Xenophon tells us of the strange tribes encountered on the way, such as the tattooed Mosynœci, who thought plumpness beautiful and proudly exhibited little boys as fat as stuffed pigs, and of the curious things which the army—marching on its belly, as all armies must—ate and drank, such as honey, which caused intoxication or even a temporary madness, and barley-brew sucked through straws. We

hear all about the amicable consultations between Xenophon and Cheirosophus, his Spartan colleague, and how they had a chaffing contest when the army had to steal across a mountain, each paying a mock tribute to the skill in stealing of the other's compatriots. During December they were in the Armenian mountains, struggling through snow over their waists and suffering terribly from frost-bite, snow-blindness, and the deadly sleepiness from which their leaders found it hard to arouse them. One day when the vanguard had climbed a mountain called Theches, a great cry was heard and Xenophon, who was with the rearguard, thought the enemy was attacking in front, for the country was all aflame behind them and its inhabitants pursuing. "But as the shout became louder and nearer and those who from time to time came up began racing at top-speed towards the shouters, and the shouting continually recommenced with yet greater volume as the numbers increased, Xenophon settled in his mind that something extraordinary must have happened, so he mounted his horse, and taking with him Lycius and the troopers, galloped to the rescue. Presently they could hear the soldiers shouting and passing on the joyful



word, 'The Sea! The Sea!' Thereupon they began running, rearguard and all, and the baggage animals and horses came galloping up. But when they had reached the summit, then, indeed, they fell to embracing one another—generals and officers and all—and the tears trickled down their cheeks." It was the feat of the Ten Thousand which revealed the weakness of the Persian Empire and inspired Agesilaus, Xenophon's chief hero, and Alexander the Great to consider plans for its conquest.

Socrates would surely have been proud of his pupil, could he have heard from his lips the story of this heroic adventure. There can be no doubt that Xenophon revered his master and remembered his teaching to the close of his long life in "stranger-loving Corinth." The philosopher's vital words run through his writings; they are his literary talismans, as it were. Their spiritual intimacy is poetically depicted in Rafael's *School of Athens*, in which Socrates is portrayed as Alcibiades described him in Plato's *Symposium*, and Alcibiades stands as a proudly-poised, helmeted and mail-clad warrior, and Xenophon as a youth with rosy cheeks and auburn hair, deeply meditating on his master's words and adding them to his treasures of

remembrance. The story of the meeting of master and pupil told by Diogenes Laertius, though part of the Socratic legend, has a charming ring of poetic truth. "Xenophon was modest of mien, and surpassingly handsome in appearance. Tradition tells how Socrates met him in a narrow way, and stretching his staff across him, plied him with questions as to where this or that commodity was to be bought, and all these inquiries were fluently answered by the boy. Finally, the sage asked him: 'And where are the fair and noble to be procured?' The boy raised his eyebrows in perplexity. Then said Socrates: 'Follow me and be taught.' So he followed him and became his hearer."

The prevalent notion that the *Memorabilia* degrades the personality of Socrates, or at any rate reduces it to the commonplace, is based on the fallacious idea that great men always talk about great matters in a great way. It ignores the truth of the saintly Bishop King's warning to a superior-minded young sacerdotalist: "My dear boy, the greatest saints are often very homely persons." Xenophon, who is writing for the ordinary man as, frankly, a mere layman in matters of philosophy, has not Plato's poetic insight into the more

profound implications of the teaching of Socrates, whether expressed in his precepts or his practice. Having shown that his master was incapable of that disregard of religion for which he was put to death, he goes on to give us a collection of anecdotes illustrating the relations of Socrates with those who sought his advice. As a rule they come to consult the oracle ; occasionally, however, when he hears of somebody in urgent need of sound advice, he goes unasked to impart it. There is something of the personal immobility of Johnson as well as of his weighty common sense in the character of Socrates, according to Xenophon. Yet it must be admitted that the Socratic method, as Xenophon shows it in operation, of getting at the real meaning of words and things is at times irritating, and that his oracular responses now and again recall the utterances of Mr. Barlow in *Sandford and Merton*. There are moments when the greatest sages, being only human after all, become a bit boresome, and Socrates was no exception to this general rule. So great is Xenophon's reverence for his philosophic hero that he treats even his truisms as truths which could only have been discovered by divine inspiration.

Throughout the *Memorabilia* Socrates

disperses practical advice. Here are a few cases in point. Aristarchus complains that, owing to the outbreak of party strife (404-3), the wholesale banishments, and the rush of people to Peiræus, his house has become crowded with poor deserted female relatives. "I have fourteen free-born souls," he complains, "under my single roof, and how are we to live? We can get nothing out of the soil—that is in the hands of the enemy; nothing from my house property, for there is scarcely a living soul left in the city. My furniture? Nobody will buy it. Money? There is none to be borrowed—you would have a better chance to find it by looking on the road than by trying to borrow from a banker." Socrates points out that Ceramon, though he has as many mouths to feed, not only furnishes himself and his household with the necessities of life, but actually realises a handsome surplus, out of the profits of his barley meal store. "Bless my soul," exclaims Aristarchus, "do you not see that he has only slaves, and I have free-born souls to feed?" After giving examples of other citizens who have started profitable businesses—Nausicydes raises pigs and other live-stock; Cyrebus has a bakery; Demeas makes cloaks, and so on—Socrates

convinces his friend that his fourteen gentlewomen would not find a little honest work degrading. So capital is borrowed, wools purchased, and everybody set to work at weaving, from breakfast time until supper was ready. It is now a contented household, and the fourteen happy, hard-working ladies chaff their now flourishing host and employer by suggesting that he is the only drone in the house who sits and eats the bread of idleness. Tell them the fable of the sheep and the watch-dog, says Socrates, and proceeds to tell it himself.

Again, Socrates meets Eutherus, an old friend, who has been abroad and is hard-up, all his family's colonial properties having been lost. He will not beg and is maintaining himself by manual labour. An elderly man, he is warned that he will presently be too old to keep his job. Why not find some large proprietor who wants a manager to look after his estate? "I could not endure the yoke of slavery," exclaims poor, disgruntled Eutherus. Socrates convinces him that he is looking at things from the wrong point of view, since even the heads of State departments are responsible to the people, their employers, and that he has only to put his whole heart and soul into the work of

management to be sure of his employer's respect, and able to make provision for his old age.

The wealthy Crito is greatly worried because a set of knavish fellows are threatening him with law-suits, not because they can prove him guilty of any misdemeanour, but owing to their belief that he would sooner pay them a sum of money than be troubled further. Socrates advises him to engage a human watch-dog to deal with such wolves, and in the end the task is entrusted to Archdemus, a practical man with a clever tongue in his head, who is too honest and good-natured to earn his living as a pettifogger. Archdemus is so successful in waging war against the blackmailers, one of whom is prosecuted and compelled to pay damages, that a number of Crito's friends are glad to make use of his services.

Socrates liked to help anybody who earned his living by the practice of an art or craft. He has a talk with Parrhasius, the painter, and gets him to admit that character must, and can, be depicted in a portrait. In a somewhat similar dialogue he convinces Cleitō, whose workshop is full of portrait-statues of runners, wrestlers, boxers and pancratiasts (all-in fighters),

all handsome young men, that the sculptor must incorporate in his ideal form not only the physical likeness, but also the workings and energies of the soul. He also pays a visit to Pistias, the maker of corselets (see Moroni's Portrait of a Tailor in the National Gallery for the type of personage) and is shown some exquisite specimens of his craftsmanship. By a series of questions he ascertains that an exactly-modelled corselet which did not "fit" (that is, allow the body to move freely) would be nothing but "a curiously-wrought and gilded nuisance." In one of his talks with Aristippus he makes serviceableness the standard of artistic beauty; so that a basket for carrying dung may be beautiful and a spear of gold ugly, if the one be well adapted and the other ill adapted to its purpose. Xenophon also recalls how he gave "a good lesson" on the building of houses. "Supposing a house to have a southern aspect," said Socrates, "sunshine during winter will steal in under the colonnade, but in summer, when the sun traverses a path right over our heads, the roof will afford an agreeable shade, will it not? If, then, such an arrangement is desirable, the southern side of a house should be built higher to catch the rays of

the winter sun, and the northern side lower to prevent the cold winds finding entrance ; in a word, it is reasonable to suppose that the pleasantest and most beautiful dwelling-place will be one in which the owner can at all seasons of the year find the pleasantest retreat and stow away his goods with the greatest security." Paintings and ornamental mouldings are apt, he thought, to deprive one of more pleasure than they confer.

The Socrates of the *Memorabilia* will apply his philosophy to the most trivial matters, such as table etiquette. When a common dinner-party was arranged, to which every guest brought a contribution, Socrates would order the servant to throw everything into the general stock, so that there was no distinction between the grand and the petty victuallers. Noticing at a supper-party a young man who put aside the plain fare and devoted himself to certain dainties, he turned the attention of the company to defining an epicure.<sup>1</sup> He suggested that such a professional eater when the rest of the world prayed for a fine harvest, saying : " May our corn and oil increase ! " would utter a private petition : " May my fleshpots multiply ! "

<sup>1</sup> Meaning a " relish eater "



Whereupon the young man who was being talked at, without desisting from the savoury viands, helped himself to a large piece of bread. Socrates, observing this, exclaimed: "Keep an eye on our friend over there, you others next him, and see fair play between the sop and the sauce."

On another occasion he criticised a guest who was dipping his sop into a succession of tasty dishes. "Why, bless me," cried the philosopher, "twenty different sorts of seasoning at one sweep! First of all he mixes up actually more ingredients than the cook himself prescribes, which is extravagant; and secondly, he has the audacity to mingle together things which the chef regards as incongruous. If the cooks are right in their methods, he is wrong and the murderer of their art. Now, is it not ridiculous to procure the greatest *virtuosi* to cook for us, and then for a fellow, without any pretence to their skill, to alter their whole procedure?" Had he lived in modern times, Socrates would have highly approved the change from the Victorian banquets of many courses to the simple dinners of to-day, at which only two or three artistic compositions are presented, and he would have preferred M. Montagné's restaurant at Paris to all

others, because the menu there is limited.

Love is one of the philosopher's favourite topics, according to this chronicle of his informal conversations. He lectures Critobulus in Xenophon's presence on the danger of a kiss, which he compares with a tarantula, no bigger than a half-obol and yet able at a touch to afflict its victim with terrible pains and drive him out of his senses. To which the matter-of-fact Xenophon replies: "Yes, but the spider injures something with its bite."

"Ah, foolish boy!" cries Socrates, "and do you imagine that these lovely creatures we adore infuse nothing with their kiss, simply because you cannot see the poison? Do you not know that this wild beast, which men call beauty in bloom, is far more dangerous than any tarantula? Why? Because the tarantula must first touch its victim, whereas he who merely glances at the other wild thing, though he be yards away, receives an injection which causes madness. Perhaps that is why the Loves are called 'archers,' because beauties can wound you at such long range. But my advice to you, Xenophon, when you catch a glimpse of these fair forms, is to run helter-skelter for dear life, without one glance backward; and to you Critobulus,

who have had your kiss, I would say : ' Go abroad for a year ; it will take as long as that to cure you of your wound ' . ”

A friend talked to Socrates of the marvellous beauty of Theodoté. “ So fair is she,” he said, “ that painters flock to draw her portrait, and to these, within the limits of decorum, she displays her wondrous charms.” Socrates and his companions hurry off to have a look at the lady, and find her posing for a painter in her own house. She, her mother and even the many waiting women are exquisitely attired, and the house itself is sumptuously furnished. After a little badinage, in which the gracious “ stranger woman ” holds her own gracefully, Socrates asks her if she has an estate in the country or a large revenue from house property or a business that employs labour on a large scale. Theodoté replies : “ My friends are my life and fortune, when they care to be kind to me.” “ By heaven, Theodoté,” says Socrates, “ a very fair property indeed, and far better worth possessing than a multitude of sheep or goats or cattle. A flock of friends ! Well ! Well ! But do you leave it to luck whether a friend lights like a fly on your hand at random, or do you use some artifice for attracting him ? ”

After all, the noblest kind of game, to wit, a lover, must be as difficult to catch as hares, the hunting of which Socrates describes in detail (here, no doubt, he is Xenophon's mouthpiece). When Theodoté refuses to admit that she uses any hunter's device, Socrates insists that she herself is her own snare. "And a close-enfolding net it is you have, I trow," he says, "being your own person, inside which sits a soul that teaches you how to please with a look and cheer with a word; how to welcome true devotion with a smile, but banish the mere pleasure-seeker from your presence. Your soul tells you what to do—to visit your beloved in sickness with solicitude, and when he has done some noble deed, to rejoice with him with great joy, and to him who passionately cares for you, to surrender yourself with heart and soul. The secret of true love, I am sure, you know; not to be merely pliant, but full of tender goodwill. And of this, too, I am sure: you can convince your lovers of your devotion not by lip phrases, but by loving acts." So the discussion, which is at least half a decorous flirtation, goes on until the fair Theodoté is herself caught as many another has been, in the net of the philosopher's inspired eloquence and kindly

knowledge of human nature. He gives her a little lecture on the art of capturing "this fearful wildfowl, man" as a lover and keeping him constant. She must not proffer her dainties until satiety has ceased and starvation cries for alms. "Oh, why, Socrates," cries the lovely Theodoté, "why are you not by my side (like the huntsman's assistant) to help me catch my friends and lovers?" The conversation ends as it began, on a note of badinage. Theodoté promises to come to him, and he to be "at home" to her, unless somebody dearer still holds him engaged.

A very human Socrates, with no trace of the "highbrow" in his composition is revealed in Xenophon's matter-of-fact recollections. He has his foibles, moreover; for example, he shows himself capable of pique when a handsome youth named Euthydemus prefers to prepare himself for public life by reading books, rather than by resorting to Socrates for lessons in true wisdom. It is clear he resented the idea that anybody could possibly believe that a large library, containing the works of the most famous poets and philosophers, was a sufficient substitute for his spoken instruction. So he betakes himself with a number of friends to the saddler's shop,

which is Euthydemus' house of call, and proceeds to attack him with solemn gibes. "It is evident," he says, "that our young friend here will be only too glad to give statesmen the benefit of his advice as soon as ever he is old enough to attend the Assembly. And his carefulness to avoid even the appearance of learning from others will provide him with an excellent prelude to his public speeches. He will begin as follows: 'Men of Athens, I have never at any time learnt anything from anybody; nor if I have ever heard of anyone as being an able statesman, well versed in speech and capable of action, have I sought to meet him personally. I have never taken the trouble to find myself a teacher from amongst those who have knowledge. Far from it—I have always been unwilling to be, or seem to be, any expert's pupil. Nevertheless, I propose to proffer you such counsel, such advice as my unaided intelligence suggests.' What an excellent preface for a man who wished the State to give him, say, the post of public physician!" It all sounds rather ill-natured, but Socrates did not believe in a bookish education and thought the end justified the means. Euthydemus, after a discussion, in which he is shown by the

flimsiest sophistries to be ignorant of what any statesman should know, becomes one of the master's most devoted disciples.

Xenophon's attempt to "Boswellise" Socrates is much more successful than most critics are willing to admit. The very lack of method and literary form in his book of reminiscences is a proof of its authenticity. It gives that practical side of the philosopher's personality which has been unduly neglected by so many of his admirers, ancient as well as modern.

The well-known "myth" of the choice of Hercules, which Socrates attributes to Prodicus of Ceos, is the most famous passage in the *Memorabilia*. As a moral apologue it is unsatisfactory, for it teaches us to be virtuous because virtue in the long run is more prolific in pleasure than vice. But it represents the loftiest thought of Xenophon's memorial to his master, and also illustrates the austerity, and even the asceticism, of the latter's daily life.

### III

It is in Plato's *Dialogues*, however, that we must seek the Socrates who is both

seer and saint and, as a moral teacher, rises to the height of the principle so eloquently enunciated by Carlyle: "Love not pleasure: love God; this is the everlasting Yea." Nine-tenths of the spiritual substance of any Life of Socrates must be derived from this source. How much of the adroit dialectician therein revealed is the real Socrates, and how much is Plato himself, wearing the mask of the Socratic irony, is a problem that can never be completely solved. There can be no doubt that this particular form of Greek dramatic irony—the wise man's pretence of ignorance, which beguiles an opponent into the dogmatic enunciation of fallacies and falsities—was a feature of the real Socrates' method. So also was the question-and-answer mode of disputation whereby the dogmatist was, in the end, compelled to confute himself.

Plato gives us delightful pictures of the philosopher's intercourse with his intimate friends and more-or-less friendly antagonists in argument. He was on amicable terms with such famous teachers as Gorgias and Protagoras, who seem to have regarded him as a sort of crank; at any rate, as a rather unpractical person. In the *Protagoras* there is a lively account of a notable



gathering of the more distinguished sophists and their devout disciples. Very early in the morning, Socrates had been awakened by a tremendous banging at his door. It was the young Hippocrates, son of Apollodorus, who rushed in to tell him that Protagoras had just arrived in Athens. "Has he robbed you of anything?" asks Socrates, amused at the youth's "very courageous madness." "Yes, indeed he has," was the reply. "He has robbed me of the wisdom he withholds from me." Socrates arises from his truckle-bed, and the two go out to take a turn in the courtyard, since the sun is not yet up and it is too early to disturb Callias, that noble patron of all the sophists, and his august guest. They walk about and talk, and the well-born youth—a prototype of the modern young man about town who is keenly interested in intellectual things—admits that, if Protagoras were to make a sophist of him, he would be ashamed to appear in such a capacity before the peoples of Greece. Here is an indication of the secret contempt which the Athenian aristocrats, like too many modern Englishmen, have for those who make teaching their vocation. When they reach the house of Callias, they stop for a while in the

portico to finish their discussion. The eunuch who keeps the door has heard them talking and refuses admittance. "Only some more sophists—the master's not at home!" he says in a grumbling voice, and bangs the door in their faces, with both hands and hearty ill-will. He is fed up with the influx of purveyors of wisdom, which has disorganised the household, his estimate of such gentry resembling that of the plumber who met an Eton master on a steamer bound to Oban, and said to him: "You and me belong to sair despitit professions."

Eventually the eunuch is persuaded to let them in, and they find Protagoras walking with his friends and followers in the cloister, or sheltered colonnade. On one side of him were his host, Callias; Paralus, the son of Pericles; and Charmides, the son of Glaucon. On the other side were Xanthippus, Pericles' other son; Philippides, the son of Philomelus; and Antimœrus of Mende, the most famous of all his disciples, who intended to make sophistry his profession. A train of obsequious listeners followed, the majority of them foreigners whom Protagoras had attracted by his voice of wisdom, magical as the lute of Orpheus, from the various

cities he had visited in his journeyings up and down Greece. "Nothing delighted me more," says Socrates, who describes the scene, "than the precision of the disciples' movements; they never got into his way, but when Protagoras and those who were with him turned back, then the band of listeners parted regularly to this side and that; he was always in front, and they wheeled round and took their places behind in perfect order.

"After him, as Homer says, 'I lifted up my eyes and saw' Hippias the Elean, sitting in the opposite cloister on a chair of state, and around him, seated on benches were Eryximachus, the son of Acumenus, and Phædrus, the Myrrhinusian, and Andron, the son of Androtion, and also a number of strangers whom he had brought with him from his native city of Elis, and some others. They were putting questions to Hippias, in physics and astronomy; and he, from his professorial chair, was discoursing on these questions and disposing of them.

"Also (as Homer also says) 'mine eyes beheld Tantalus': For Prodicus, the Cean, was also in Athens. He had been lodged in a chamber which, in the time of Hipponicus (Callias' father) had been used as

a storeroom. As, however, the house was always full, Callias had made it into a guest-chamber. Now Prodicus was still in bed, wrapped up in sheepskins and blankets, of which there seemed to be a huge pile. There was sitting with him, on couches nearby, Pausanias of the parish (deme) of Cerāmeis, and with Pausanias was a young man, quite a boy, who is remarkable for his good looks and also, if I am not mistaken, for his gracious and gentle disposition. I thought I heard him called Agathon, and have an idea that he is the beloved friend of Pausanias. There was this youth, and also the two Adeimantuses, one the son of Cepis, and the other of Leucolophides, and several others. I was very anxious to hear what Prodicus was saying, for he strikes me as an all-wise and inspired man. But I was not able to get into the inner-circle of his listeners, and his fine, deep voice caused an echo in the room which made his words inaudible."

It was like a meeting in the Middle Ages of famous wandering scholars, each with his tail of pupils who had given up their chances of material success to follow a torch-bearer of learning. The house of Callias was, for the time being, an improvised university, a sort of miniature

Chataugua, and all the young intellectuals of Athens were there to hear the distinguished visitors, and, perhaps, arrange to take a course with one or other of them. The arrival of Socrates must have caused much secret excitement. One can imagine Pausanias, say, whispering to his beloved: "Here's old Socrates come to take on Protagoras, who probably doesn't know he is the cleverest disputant in Athens—that is, in the whole world. Now, we shall see some fun!" Alcibiades and Critias arrive before the disputation begins; so that nearly every member of the "set" (it can hardly be called a "school") intimately associated with Socrates, is present to hear it.

Socrates introduces Hippocrates to Protagoras, not forgetting to point out that he is the scion of a powerful and prosperous house, and a match for anybody of his age in natural ability. Protagoras thanks Socrates for the confidence shown in him by this introduction, and at once enters on a curious vindication of sophistry as an art of great antiquity. The jealousy and enmity caused by sophists, who visit cities where they are strangers, and draw the flower of the youth in them away from their kinsmen, have to be considered. It

was to avoid this odium that the ancient sophists veiled and disguised themselves under various names. Some, including Homer, Hesiod, and Simonides called themselves poets; others, among them Orpheus and Musæus, passed as hierophants and prophets; others, again, as teachers of gymnastic, like Iccius of Tarentum, or the more recently celebrated Herodicus now of Selymbria, but formerly of Megara, who is a first-rate sophist. Such is the theory of Protagoras, who says he is old enough to be the father of anybody present and, speaking from long experience, insists that openness is the best policy for a member of his profession. "I hope by the favour of heaven," he adds, "that no harm will come of the acknowledgment that I am a sophist."

Socrates suspects that the good old man would like to have a little display and glorification in the presence of his distinguished fellow-professors. So Callias and Alcibiades get Prodicus out of bed, and Hippias—the Leonardo da Vinci of his age—is asked to listen in. Everybody is delighted at the idea of hearing wise men discourse, and after a preliminary discussion Protagoras relates the "myth" of Prometheus and Epimetheus, making it

the basis of a lecture on education as a means of promoting virtue, which cannot, as he thinks, be directly taught. He concludes his discourse as follows: "A teacher of this sort I believe myself to be, and above all other men to have the knowledge which makes a man good and noble; and I give my pupils their money's-worth, and even more, as they themselves confess. And therefore I have introduced the following mode of payment: When a man has been my pupil, if he likes he pays my price, but there is no compulsion; and if he does not like, he has only to enter a temple and take an oath of the value of the instruction, and he pays no more than the amount thus declared."

Socrates is so impressed by the earnest eloquence of the grave and weighty old man that he praises it in words that have been borrowed by Milton. When this Apologue is ended, he still seems speaking:

"So charming soft his voice, that I the while  
Thought him still speaking; still stood fixed  
to hear."

But in the disputation that follows, Protagoras, relying on the old art of rhetoric, is no match for Socrates, who is master of the new science of cut-and-thrust

argument. The famous sophist's self-assertion fails and falls before the Socratic irony, and when Prodicus and Hippias intervene, they also are made to appear ludicrous. It is an easy victory for the Athenian champion, with the agility of an intellectual light-weight and the punch of a moral heavy-weight.

In the *Gorgias*, we meet yet another of the arch-sophists, who had the ear of the younger generation and were famous throughout the Greek world. Gorgias, the Sicilian professor of rhetoric, can practice what he teaches; indeed, as a public speaker, he has made himself something of a force in politics. When Socrates arrives at the house of Callicles, where he is staying, his host greets him with the proverbial saying: "The wise man is late for a fray, but not for a feast." Having loitered in the market-place with his constant companion Chærephon (held up to ridicule in *The Clouds*), Socrates is late for the feast of many brave things furnished forth by the eloquent Sicilian. But Gorgias has kindly promised to answer any questions put to him by Callicles' friends, dealing with "hecklers" being a part of the art of persuasion he professes, and when he is asked if it is so, Gorgias replies: "Quite



right, Chærephon ; I was saying as much only a moment ago ; and I may add, it is many years since anybody asked me a new one." Gorgias, though not as venerable and venerated as the aged Protagoras, is a person to be respected, and his only fault, which every student of human nature will excuse, is an overcoming confidence in the power of rhetoric, which, he thinks, includes in itself every other kind of power. "On several occasions," he says, by way of proving that rhetoric holds under its sway all the other arts, "I have been with my friend Herodicus, or some other physician, to see one of his patients who would not allow the physician to give him medicine or apply the scalpel or cautery in his case ; and just by the use of rhetoric I have persuaded him to do for me what he would not do for the physician. And I say that if a rhetorician and a physician were to go to any city, and had to appear before the Ecclesia and state their respective claims for a government medical post, the physician would have no chance and the capable speaker be elected, if he so wished. And in a similar contest with the member of any other craft the result would be the same—for there is no subject about which the master

of rhetoric cannot speak more effectively to the multitude than any other professional man." Gorgias, however, is no match for Socrates in argument, being unable to get down to first principles; nor does his eager disciple Polus fare any better when he carries on with the controversy, to relieve his tired master. And when the frankly non-moral Callicles intervenes, insisting that might is right, even in the guise of law—that, as Pindar says, "Law, lord of all, does violence with a high hand"—and that luxury and self-indulgence—what is called in modern parlance, "living one's life"—are virtue and happiness, then the real meaning of Socrates' opposition is gradually made manifest. In four great theses which rise to the height of Christian ethics, he gives the lie to the world and the flesh. Firstly, it is a greater ill to do than to suffer injustice; secondly, it is better to be punished for wrong-doing than not to be punished; thirdly, we do not what we will, but what we wish; fourthly, to be and not to seem is the end of life. And as he enforces this fourfold faith, ignoring Callicles' warning that he would not be able to defend himself in a law-court, unless he learns to "walk in the ways of the worldly and be wise," the halo of

martyrdom glimmers into being and brightens above his head. And, when he has concluded with one of his great "myths" of the Hereafter, Callicles is silent and the eloquent Sicilian has no more to say.

In the *Euthydemus*, we meet two of those professors of universal knowledge who were chiefly responsible for the evil reputation of the sophists among honest, serious-minded citizens. Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are an amusing pair of itinerant teachers, whose skill in verbal conjuring-tricks has brought them a great number of pupils. They have taken to teaching virtue (instead of strategy, rhetoric, and other arts) because it happens to be the most profitable form of sophistry for the moment. They are the prototypes of Juvenal's hungry Greekling, who was by turn :—

*Grammaticus rhetor geometres pictor aliptes*  
*Augur schoenobates medicus magus—*

or anything else which was in fashion and so provided opportunities for the charlatan to earn a dishonest penny. They are a conceited couple ; what they know not is not knowledge. Two engaging lads, the gentle, innocent Clinias and the healthy-

mind Ctesippus, who is inclined to be violent, are made the victims of their ingenious use of the question-and-answer method to prove any sort of absurd paradox. Some of their arguments are on a level with the famous fourth-form syllogism—nothing is better than a good conscience; sixpence is better than nothing; therefore, a good conscience is not worth sixpence. Clinias is a bit mystified by their outrageous quibbles. But his friend Ctesippus, though he cannot spot the fallacies, has too much commonsense to take their paradoxes seriously. He is rude to them, and one feels that he would like to use physical force as a final argument. As the late A. D. Godley pointed out, the attitude of Ctesippus to these “too clever by half” fellows was that of the average child to the infant prodigy: “I can’t play the piano and I can’t speak French, but I *can* punch your head.” This was also the attitude of the Athenian crowd towards all sophists. Socrates tells Crito, his friend and coeval, about this discussion, satirically adding: “Evidently these are the right sort of teachers for you and me.” “Why,” replies Crito, whose sense of humour is not very acute, “I have just met a friend who heard it all and was thoroughly

disgusted. If that sort of thing is philosophy, ought it to be taught to our sons?" To which the answer of Socrates is that philosophy must not be judged by the ways of its exponents.

Crito is one of the old men who delights in the society of Socrates, and another is Cephalus, who has a house at Peiræus and is too old to seek him out in the city. At the beginning of the "Republic" we see him seated on a cushioned seat and crowned for a sacrifice and hear his eager greeting. He complains that Socrates does not come to see him as often as he ought and give him the pleasure of conversation which, as the pleasures of the body fade away, becomes more and more delightful. Socrates replies that he likes nothing better than conversing with old men, whom he regards as travellers who have gone a journey which he also may have to go, and can tell him whether the road is smooth and easy, or rough and difficult. Cephalus thinks that the sorrow and discontents of old age are to be attributed to the characters of the sufferers, not to old age itself, which ought to be a period of peacefulness, in which the tyranny of the passions—likened by Sophocles to mad masters—is no longer felt. Socrates,

anxious to find the secret of the old man's serenity, suggests that many people are of opinion that old age sits lightly on him, not because of his happy disposition, but because he is wealthy, and wealth is known to be a great comforter. Cephalus admits that there is something in what they say, but not as much as they imagine. He might reply to them as Themistocles replied to the Seriphian who said he was famous, not for his own merits, but because he was a citizen of Athens: "If you had been a citizen of my city, or I of yours, neither of us would have been famous." So it can be said that neither a poor good man nor a rich bad man can expect a happy old age. Socrates observes that Cephalus appears not to care about riches, perhaps because he did not acquire, but inherited them, and asks what he considers the chief advantage of being rich. Cephalus replies that as you become old, belief in the world below grows on you, and then to have done justice and never to have been compelled by poverty to do injustice are felt as ineffable blessings. "What is the meaning of the word justice?" asks Socrates, preparing the way for an argument; but Cephalus retires to attend to the sacrifices, bequeathing the disputation to his son

and heir, Polemarchus. There is no more charming portrait in ancient literature of a happy and serene old age, which has been justly earned.

But Socrates naturally preferred the society of young men to that of their elders, since it was his mission to make converts to the faith that was for him right and delight from within. In the *Lysis* we meet a number of well-born youths who attend the school lately built by the worthy Miccus, his friend and admirer. When he entered, the boys had finished the sacrifice, and there they were, all in their best, playing knucklebones. (What would they have thought of football, as played by the Athenian lads of to-day?) Among those who merely watched the games of odd and even, going on in a corner of the vestibule, was Lysis, wearing a garland, who was conspicuous for his remarkable beauty, and even more for the singular nobility of his presence. He keeps turning round to look at Socrates and his companions, who are sitting and talking on the opposite side of the room, but is too shy to join them. When, however, his particular friend, Menexenus, sits down by Socrates, he plucks up courage to join the party. A discussion on friendship follows, which

comes to an end when the "pedagogues," the boys' attendants, who have been drinking too much at the Hermæa, and talk angrily with a barbarous accent, insist on taking Lysis and Menexenus home. Lysis, whose portrait must have been drawn from life, is a charming type of the Athenian schoolboy of good family, who was allowed none of the freedom of our more or less autonomous Public Schools. His gentleness and graceful "deportment" strike us as more girlish than boyish, but his combined simplicity and readiness of self-expression somehow suggest the Etonian. Indeed, an Oxford tutor once described the lads at Miccus' school as "Nature's Etonians," which elicited a laugh from his pupils.

In the *Charmides*, we are introduced to a somewhat older youth, who is receiving the tribute of admiring looks, reserved in these days for a beautiful débutante. "All gazed at him," says Socrates, "as at a statue." Charmides, however, is unspoilt by all this adoration; he has the spiritual poise or steadfastness<sup>1</sup> which is the essential quality of a "fair and good" Greek character. He is modest, and blushes as

<sup>1</sup> *Ευφροσύνη* is often translated "temperance", but there is no exact English equivalent for this ethical key-word.



readily as Lysis. Socrates, like Pheidias and other fifth-century Greek artists whose presentations of Athena or Artemis had far more of the beauty of a man than of a maid, found the climax of human grace in the male rather than in the female form. Perhaps we should agree with them, following Goethe's lead, but for a sexual obsession which would have seemed a kind of mania to Plato and even Aristotle. Socrates sees in the perfect Attic grace of Charmides the outward and visible sign of a beautiful soul, and he thinks his twofold crowd-compelling charm is the natural outcome of his happy origin. "Well," he says, "it is only right that you should excel in all good qualities, Charmides; for I suppose nobody here present could mention two Athenian houses whose union would be likely to produce a fairer and nobler offspring than the two from which you are sprung. The praises of your father's family, descended from Critias, who was the son of Dropidas, have come down to us through the poems of Solon, Anacreon, and many other singers, all of whom celebrate it as excelling in beauty and virtue and all other forms of felicity. Nor is your mother's family less renowned, for wherever her brother Pyrilampes went as envoy, whether to the

Great King's Court in Persia, or to the palaces of any Asiatic sovereign, they say he never found his peer for beauty and stateliness of presence—so, considering all things, the maternal side of your family was not in any way inferior to your father's." This adroit flattery, the kind of tribute paid to excelling beauty in every age, reveals a phase of the social *flair* of Socrates, which seems to have been overlooked by all the commentators. He was as much a master of family history as, say, Mr. Vicary Gibbs has shown himself in our days, and so was able to please a new acquaintance and make a friend of him by praising his ancestors—a form of adulation by proxy, which often proves irresistible. In the discussions on steadfastness which follows his meeting with Charmides, no definite result is reached; the virtue is too vicarious to be caught and held in a formal definition. But it is clear Socrates has made a friend for ever of the ingenuous, yet ingenious, Charmides, who realises for us the Greek ideal of the fair soul in a fair body.

Yet of all the young friends of Socrates, the brilliant and ill-starred Alcibiades is the most fascinating by far. He was the consummate dandy of his period and the

model for all young men about town, who imitated the lisp in his speech and the swagger with which he trailed his cloak as he walked. If half the tales are true, his private life was one continual debauch. The Athenian people idolised him for his public liberality and the glory which his victories in the Olympic chariot-races—equivalent to the winning of the Derby and other classic events—reflected on his native city in the eyes of Greece. Plutarch compares him to the chameleon, and Catiline himself was not more of an expert in making himself all things to all men, and he was able to conciliate the most divergent types. His first entry into politics was a triumph, and his subsequent alliance with Nicias made him a power in the state. Nothing stranger was ever seen in the bewildering kaleidoscope of Greek city politics than this combination between the most strait-laced champion of rigid orthodoxy in religion and morality and a notorious young rake whose only god was himself. Had he possessed the quality of steadfastness, he might have been the successor of Pericles, who, since his parents had died in his childhood, had acted as his guardian; for as a public speaker, as a diplomatist, and as a general, he displayed the highest abilities. Fifteen

years after the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, his fame reached its height, and then a strange event occurred which brought about his downfall. He had been chosen as one of the leaders of the Sicilian Expedition, which had been decided on largely at his instigation and against the advice of Nicias and other experienced soldiers, and was on the eve of departure—his head full of fantastic dreams of an Athenian Empire in the West, which might have changed the destinies of Carthage and even of Rome. He had the beauty and the colossal ambitions of Alexander the Great, but he had no Philip to provide him with an unbreakable weapon of conquest, and it was too soon to look in the right direction for a world to conquer. When the great fleet was ready to sail, the whole city was shocked by a mysterious act of sacrilege. Outside nearly every Athenian house or shrine stood a square stone pillar, as a rule with a sculptured head at the top, which was dedicate to Hermes, god of ways and bounds. One morning Athens awoke to find that nearly all of these pillars had been deliberately defaced, and the whole body of citizens were as horror-struck as the inhabitants of a Roman Catholic city would be, if it was suddenly discovered that all

the effigies and portraits of the Virgin Mary had been mutilated. Who were the culprits? That remains one of the historical problems which can never be satisfactorily solved. The sacrilege was too complete to have been the work of drunken revellers, and the suggestion that it was the work of paid agents of Corinth or Syracuse is as good as any of the many theories advanced. But the enemies of Alcibiades, and the friends who were jealous of his greatness, raked up an old story of how he and his dissipated follower had once parodied the Eleusinian Mysteries. When the Expedition had reached Sicily, Alcibiades was recalled to stand trial for profanation, and he at once deserted to the enemy. He succeeded in persuading the unimaginative Spartans to adopt two plans, each in its way a cause of the ruin of Athens; firstly, to send a Spartan general to organise the defence of Syracuse, and secondly, to fortify and occupy Decelea in Attic territory. From the enemy's point of view the fortification of Decelea was a stroke of military genius. The enemy outpost, which was too near the Boeotian border to be attacked, and yet was visible to keen eyes from the Athenian citadel, was a perpetual menace. It kept the watchers on the walls

under a never-ending strain and was a rendezvous for runaway slaves, numbering 20,000 in the last stage of the war who could be used for raids and the complete destruction of the farms. It rendered any cultivation of the soil impossible, cut off road communications with Eubœa, which was the war-time repository of the farmers' live-stock, and compelled the Laureion silver-mines to close down, thus greatly reducing the state revenue. After intriguing with Tissaphernes, the Persian Governor of Western Asia Minor, he was able to negotiate with the contending factions at Athens and arrange for his return home, where he was hailed as the saviour of his country. He seemed to deserve the title, since his leadership enabled Athens to regain something of her former power and prestige. Once more, however, either his own misconduct or the jealousy of his rivals forced him into exile, and his defection was followed by the crowning disaster at Ægospotami, which placed Athens at the mercy of her enemies. Throughout his chequered career, the cause was always victorious which this amazing adventurer had for a time made his own. But nobody could trust him, and he did not long outlive the downfall of his native

city. An exile from Athens, he was obnoxious to Sparta; and since it was Persian policy to conciliate the leading State in Greece, he was assassinated by the mercenaries of the Great King.

When he became a power in war and politics, Alcibiades ceased, so far as we know, to have any intercourse with his old master. At the time of the trial and execution he was an exile from Athens, living in his own private castle on the Hellespont, from which, by the way, he emerged to warn the Athenians of the risk they were running at Ægospotami—only to be snubbed for his pains. The two Dialogues attributed to Plato which bear his name are of doubtful authenticity, and we have to depend on Plato's *Symposium*, surely, the most perfect of all his literary masterpieces, for our knowledge of his early relations with Socrates.

Xenophon also has left us a *Symposium*, which presents a lively picture of Socrates in convivial society. It is a most entertaining sketch, full of movement and merriment, though not free from a certain Spartan grossness. Dakyns, while admitting that Plato's idealisation of an Athenian supper-party is the finest work by far, thinks that the parallelisms between

the two prove that Xenophon was the pioneer in this form of composition. "Somehow and to some extent," he writes, "it haunted, I think, the brain of Plato whilst engaged upon his own much more splendid composition, much as an early overture of Mozart's (the *Intrade* to his juvenile operetta *Bastien et Bastienne*) or some *volkslied* would seem to have haunted the brain of Beethoven when composing the *Eroica*." This type of dialogue, which still survives in the dinner scenes of modern plays, was attempted by a long line of famous writers (especially philosophers and "grammarians") from Aristotle to Lucian.<sup>1</sup> But we could cheerfully endure the loss of all the other "Symposia" as long as we kept Plato's immortal achievement.

It is the description of a supper-party at the house of Agathon, which becomes a discussion of the nature of Love, the six discourses on the subject being attributed to Phædrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Agathon and Socrates. The

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, Speusippus, Epicurus, Didymus, Herodian, Lucian, Athenæus and Plutarch (*Convivium septem sapientium*) are among Plato's imitators. The Emperor Julian and Macrobius are also said to have written "Symposia," and the climax of oddity must have been reached by St. Methodius, Bishop of Tyre, whose edifying effort has ten virgins for interlocutors.



speeches are attested by the best possible authority. The "madman" Apollodorus, who for three years past has made a daily study of the words and actions of Socrates—to him the sentence, "Great is Socrates," sums up the whole world's significance—has heard them from another "madman," Aristodemus, who was the shadow of Socrates in days of old, going about barefooted as he did and ceasing not to follow him both night and day. What better witness could be wished for? After dinner the question arises how the evening shall be spent—in plain words, shall they all get drunk or not? The company, however, want to find an excuse for sobriety; some are temperate by nature, and the others have had all the wine they wanted the night before. So it is arranged that the flute-girl, without whom no dinner-party would be complete, shall be sent "to the women within," and that the evening shall be devoted to a series of set orations, celebrating the powers and principalities of Love. Each of the six speakers has his own peculiar and personal point of view, but it is Socrates who puts the whole subject in a just perspective, taking from each of the five preceding speakers his most vital and pivotal reflection. From

Phædrus, he takes the thought that love is mightier than death; from Pausanias, that it is akin to intellectual and practical activity; from Eryximachus, that it is the greatest power of nature, universal and ubiquitous; from Aristophanes that love is not only the desire of the Just for its completion, but also a yearning for the god which is God; and from Agathon that it is the wish not only to possess beauty, but to engender the beautiful. All these discourses are "in character"; especially that of Aristophanes, for there is nothing more truly Aristophanic than his conception of the original human monster with its eight whirling limbs, so swift and terrible and dangerous that it had to be divided into two-armed bipeds so as to make the universe safe for the gods. Pausanias' speech is a panegyric on those passionate friendships between persons of the same sex, which the opinion of Christendom has not encouraged, since in not a few temperaments they are liable to degenerate into horrible evil—leading sometimes to a particular perversion which the Church has condemned as a heresy and punished as such!

In ancient Greece, especially at Thebes

and Sparta, the honourable attachment of a youth to an older man was a part of his education. The "invincible army of lovers and their beloved," of which Pausanias spoke, was not a mere fiction of Plato's. It actually existed at Thebes in the glorious days of Epaminondas, perhaps the noblest of all historic Greek characters, when the "Sacred Band" was the spear-head of the army that humiliated Sparta. These attachments provided the romantic element in love in an age when women were regarded as inferior creatures, and held in seclusion. In theory they were deemed higher than the love of man and woman, because altogether separated from the indulgence of bodily appetites. Something of the kind exists to-day in those ardent school friendships, which are praised by Disraeli and ignored by headmasters, except when they become perverted, as happens too often. Physical depravity is never in the least degree excused by Plato or any other Greek writer of mark. It would seem that in ancient Greece innocent attachments of the kind were the rule rather than the exception, and that the bestial grossness of a later age, when Rome had in so many ways defiled her Greek heritage, would have been regarded by the "fair and good"

products of Athenian culture as merely a disgusting phase of the savagery of barbarian races. Yet the outrageous confession of the drunken Alcibiades in the *Symposium*, shows how perilous to the soul such affairs might become of a sudden. Now that woman has been freed from the antique tyrannies, which even Athens acquiesced in, and is man's intellectual equal—so that she flies to the head as well as to the heart, at any rate, in the Western world—and Christianity has made the at-one-ment of the sexes a sacrament, our instinct for romance needs no such ministrations.

Plato's *Symposium* was the *locus classicus* of love lore for all ancient writers. It contains the best that could be said on the subject before the modern ideals created by Christianity and chivalry came into being. Agathon (described, after his death, by Aristophanes as "a good poet and one regretted by his friends") in his poetical rhapsody in praise of the winged Eros, Lord of men and gods, reaches a loftier plane than any of his predecessors in the discussion. "Love," he says, "frees us from estrangement and fills us with affinity, causing us to meet together at such festivals as this; at holy feasts and dances and at

sacrifices he is our lord and leader—a replenisher of courtesy and the banisher of boorishness; lavish of charity, chary of unkindness; friend of the good; the wonder of the wise; amazing even to the gods; a treasure for those who have him not to covet, for those who have him to cherish; sire of delicacy, daintiness, desire, devotion, and delicious delights; careful of good, careless of evil; in every work, word, wish, and wayward fear, the best of guides, guardians, companions and preservers; heaven's guerdon and earth's glory; the most radiant and righteous of captains, whom every man must follow, follow, singing sweetly in his honour and adding soft syllables to the enthralling chant which for ever thrills the hearts of lowly earth and lofty heaven."<sup>1</sup>

Yet, when Socrates sums up, he lifts the argument beyond the highest flight of Eros with his iris'd plumes. As it would be out of character for Socrates to make a monologue after the manner of the hireling sophists, he tells the company how he was schooled in the art of loving by a lady "in the lore of love deep learned to the red heart's core," Diotima of Mantinea, that sibyl who in the days of old, when the

<sup>1</sup> This passage defies the translator's art.

Athenians offered sacrifice before the coming of the plague, delayed the disease for a decade. She it was who taught him that love is another aspect of philosophy. As Dante saw all things in his love for Beatrice, so this prophetess found all the lesser desires in this passion of the reason. Love at its highest is to her what the *fructio Dei* was to the mediæval saint, and the burning intensity of fleshly human passion was a spark of the eternal fire from heaven's altars. Beauty-in-itself is the end of man's living and loving; the contemplation thereof gives a happiness but faintly shadowed forth in the earthly love of beautiful things and persons. Let man learn, then, to see the true beauty simple and divine. "Remember how in that communion only," saith the prophetess, "beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be able to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities (for he now has hold, not of an image, but of a reality) and bringing forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may." If the marriage of Eros and Psyche was not yet, at any rate in literature, Diotima's pupil had announced their engagement.

Then Alcibiades comes ranting and

roaring in, and we have his "character" of Socrates. And with the entrance of another rout of revellers, everybody is compelled to drink huge quantities of wine. Aristodemus falls asleep and takes a good rest, the nights being long. When he is aroused by the crowing of cocks, only Socrates, Aristophanes, and Agathon are left. They were drinking out of a large cup, which they passed about, and Socrates was discoursing and compelling them to admit that the genius of tragedy was the same as that of comedy. They were obliged to assent, being too drowsy quite to follow the argument. First, Aristophanes dropped off, and then Agathon. Socrates having put them to bed, rose to depart; Aristodemus, as his custom was, following him. At the Lyceum he took a bath, and passed the day as usual. In the evening he retired to rest at his own house.

## I

XENOPHON assures us that Socrates was the most pious of men, punctilious in showing his reverence for the gods by prayer and sacrifice, openly and in the sight of all men. We could not wish for a more reliable witness, seeing that Xenophon had been brought up in the old-fashioned way approved by Aristophanes (see the passage cited from the *Clouds*) and never took any important step in life without sacrificing and inspecting the entrails of the victims. The following story from the *Anabasis* shows how sedulously he courted the favour of all the gods. At Lampsacus, when that amazing adventure of the Ten Thousand was nearly at an end, he fell in with Eucleides, a soothsayer whom he had known at Athens. Eucleides asked him if he had any gold (Persia was the Greeks' Eldorado) and was astounded to hear he would have to sell his horse in order to pay his passage home. He suggested that Xenophon's lack of funds might be due to his neglect while



abroad of Zeus Meilichios (that is, Zeus in his mild and beneficent aspect), who was annually honoured at the Athenian festival of the Diasia. At home, Eucleides had been in the habit of offering whole burnt offerings to that deity on Xenophon's behalf. The suggestion was actually made when the twain were engaged in sacrificing to Apollo. Next day Xenophon went to Ophrynium and sacrificed to Zeus the Gentle One, "offering a holocaust of swine, after the custom of his family," and the signs he obtained were favourable. That very day, Bion and Nausicleides arrived laden with gifts for the army, and they bought back Xenophon's horse for fifty darics (the equivalent of fifty guineas) and made him a present of it, having heard that he was fond of the beast and suspecting he had parted with it out of sheer necessity. Evidently Xenophon was a prototype of the pious Irishman, who "pestered all the saints with candles and so got the better of his neighbours," and he would never have become the disciple of a teacher who was lax in the observance of customary rites and ceremonies.

Socrates, he tells us, advised his intimate friends to rely upon their intelligence in all matters that lay within the scope of

human judgment, since to seek the help of Olympus in the ordinary necessities of life was a sort of profanity. "Our duty is plain," he would observe, "where we are permitted to work through our natural faculties, there let us by all means use them. But in things which are hidden, let us seek to gain knowledge from above, by divination; for the gods," he added, "grant signs to them to whom they would be gracious." Plato confirms Xenophon's view of Socrates as a man of exemplary piety who always kept to the petty ritual (pouring libations, invoking the appropriate deity on social occasions, etc.) which was a part of Greek everyday life and might be defined as the etiquette of a mortal's relations with the immortals. His last words in dying, that he owed a cock to Asclepius and Crito must see the debt was paid, are a case in point. Modern commentators who think they were spoken in jest or were the last flash of the Socratic irony, show their ignorance of the Greek spirit of minute and matter-of-fact reverence. Socrates was glad to be cured of the "fever of living" and simply wished to express his gratitude to the god of healing. It may be said of Socrates, as George Eliot said of one of her characters

that "he had that mental combination which is at once humble in the region of mystery and keen in the region of knowledge."

There can be no doubt that Socrates believed in God ; but did he believe in the gods ? He certainly refused to credit the mythological tales of their quarrels, fights, and scandalous love-affairs. For all that, I am convinced that he believed that Athena, Apollo, and the rest really existed ; though his conception of them may have been very different from that held by uncultured folk. "The Olympians," says Professor Gilbert Murray, "are artist's dreams, ideals, allegories ; they are the symbols of something beyond themselves. They are gods of a half-rejected tradition, of unconscious make-believe, of inspiration. They are gods to whom the doubtful philosophers can pray, with all a philosopher's due caution, as to so many radiant and heart-searching hypotheses. *They are not gods in whom any one believes as a hard fact.* . . . Something like this, I take it, was the character of the Olympian religion in the higher minds of later Greece. Its gods could awaken man's worship and strengthen his higher aspirations ; but at heart they knew themselves to be only

metaphors. As the most beautiful image carved by man was not the god, but only a symbol to help towards conceiving the god, so the god himself when conceived was not the reality but only a symbol to help towards conceiving the reality."<sup>1</sup> The sentence I have italicised shows how even a great Greek scholar may fail to grasp the obvious realities of life in a distant age, chiefly because they are so obvious. The Parthenon was not built in honour of an artist's dream; Xenophon did not sacrifice holocausts of swine to an allegory; and Socrates did not pray aloud to metaphors. When Socrates says of the gods in Plato's *Euthyphro* (which introduces the pietist, or religious prig): "There is no good thing which they do not give us," or observes in the *Phædo*: "It seems to me to be well said that the gods look after us, and that we men are the possessions of the gods"; he is thinking of real divinities, not of stepping-stones to some divine reality. The same deep trust in the personal goodwill of gods towards men is explained in his short and simple prayers, which have no taint of bargaining and ask only for the things that the gods know to be good for him. It is clear that he believed that man

<sup>1</sup> *Four Stages of Greek Religion*, pp. 97-98.

was dearer to the gods than to himself, thus anticipating the Christian conception of Christ's infinite loving-kindness. In the *Phædrus*, he is taken for a walk in the country outside the city gates and, though as confirmed a *boulevardier* as Paris ever knew, is delighted with the pleasance his guide has been trying to find. "By Here," he cries, "a fair resting-place, full of summer sounds and scents. Here is this lofty and spreading plane-tree, and the agnus castus high and clustering, in the fullest blossom and the greatest fragrance; and the stream which flows beneath the plane-tree is deliciously cool to the feet. Judging from the ornaments and images, this must be a spot sacred to Achelous and the Nymphs. How delightful is the breeze—how passing sweet!—and there is a shrill and summerlike sound in the air which makes answer to the chorus of the cicadæ. But the greatest charm of all is the grass, like a pillow gently sloping to the head." When the discussion is over and the heat of the sun abated, the twain rise to depart, and Socrates offers up a prayer to the local deities. "Beloved Pan," he cries, "and all ye other gods who haunt this place, give me beauty in the inward soul; and may the outward man

and the inward man be at one. May I deem the wise to be the wealthy, and may I have such wealth as a wise man, and only he, can bear and carry." In the still-living Greek this prayer might have been uttered in liquid syllables by the little stream itself, which was flowing through the sanctuary where the heavenly love that lifts the soul had been glorified. How easy it is to reconcile Socrates' belief in gods with his belief in an all-wise and omnipotent deity, greater and more glorious far than the Zeus of the current mythology! Do not Christians believe in the Communion of Saints? And did not Christ Himself believe in the existence of legions of angels obeying His Father's commands? In Socrates we have the *anima naturaliter Christiana* whose brief prayers surpass the utterances of many twentieth-century Christians in wisdom and humility.

## II

There were times when Socrates would suddenly fall into a mood of rapt contemplation and become lost to the world about him. His close friends were well

acquainted with this strange habit and would refrain from disturbing him, even when the occasion was inconvenient. A typical instance is given in Plato's *Symposium*, when he and Aristodemus, the small man who followed him like his shadow at all times and in all places, were on their way together to the house of Agathon, who had just won the official prize for his first tragedy and was celebrating his victory by a dinner to a few intimate friends. Aristodemus, on entering the house, suddenly discovered that he was alone. Socrates was probably the guest of the evening, so a servant was sent out to find and fetch him. The servant came back with the tidings that Socrates had retired into the portico of a neighbouring house: "There he stands, and when I call, he will not come." Aristodemus, to prevent any further attempts to molest the master and "break into his beatitude" (to use a phrase in the mediæval history of a mystic's life) explained to the company that it was a habit of Socrates to withdraw himself in this way and stand absorbed just where he happened to be. It was not until the banquet was half over that Socrates came in, his spell of contemplation having been briefer than usual.

It was clear from Plato's account<sup>1</sup>, is these spells were by no means infrequent<sup>his</sup>. And when Alcibiades came on to Agathor<sup>e</sup>'s dinner-party, gloriously drunk on somebody<sup>t</sup> else's wine, and delivered his half-humorous, half-reverent, ecstatic and exasperated panegyric on Socrates, he gave an extraordinary example, speaking as an eye-witness, of the master's capacity for profound and prolonged meditation. When on active service at Potidæa he had "a spell of this self-concentration in thought lasting from dawn to noon," which aroused everybody's curiosity. But he remained standing on the same spot, oblivious to his surroundings and the looks and comments of observers, through the whole of the following night, and not till a new day dawned did he come to himself and go about his worldly business, having first piously addressed an invocation to the rising sun.

Most deep thinkers have fits of abstraction, during which bodily needs are forgotten, while the mind—or, rather, imagination—toils intensively. It was so with Newton, "voyaging through strange seas of thought alone" and seeking the solution of some vast problem in astronomy, the most august of the sciences. On one occasion, the author of the *Principia* (who



acqu( also a profound theologian) was dis-  
wowered, late in the morning, sitting half-  
whessed in bed, sunk in contemplation ;  
And on another, which recalls the late  
arrival of Socrates at Agathon's party, he  
remained for a long time in his cellar,  
whither he had gone to fetch a bottle of  
wine for his guests, in order to follow out  
a train of thought to its conclusion.

Socrates' shorter spells of meditation,  
resembling the "sleep" of some great  
passionless machine working at top speed,  
may have been similar instances of intense  
mental activity. But it is highly probable  
that the longer ones, such as that which  
astonished his military comrades at  
Potidæa, resembled the beatific trances  
that were part of the spiritual life of  
mediæval saints of the mystical order—  
those sacred amorists whom Dante places  
in the Seraphic, rather than in the Cherubic  
circle, of his Paradise in being. The in-  
stinctive adoption of a discomfortable  
posture is significant. A strong man will  
find that the effort to stand motionless for  
a single hour becomes a form of self-torture,  
and Socrates' ability to maintain such a  
posture for a whole day and night recalls  
the strange feats of Eastern fakirs which  
are inspired by the theory that bodily

pain, if it be sufficiently prolonged, is an aid to ecstatic contemplation. In his introduction to Sir Rabindranath Tagore's *Song Offerings*, Mr. W. B. Yeats, the most other-worldly of our living poets, tells us how the Indian poet and his father would indulge in profound meditations on divine matters; without, however, maltreating the body, in the hope of releasing the soul from fleshly influences. Of Sir Rabindranath Tagore an eye-witness said that "every morning at three, he sits immovable in contemplation, and for two hours does not awake from his reverie upon the nature of God. His father, the Maya Rishi, would sometimes sit there all through the day; once, upon a river, he fell into contemplation because of the beauty of the landscape, and the rowers waited for eight hours before they could continue their journey." Such ecstatic contemplation, seeking a closer communion with immanent Deity and, as I believe, finding it, is a commonplace of the great Eastern religions which are the Himalayas of human hope, towering above all practical 'ics and 'isms and white with the unstirred snows of eternal thought. But the West, also, has its travellers on that *Via Mystica*, which is, perhaps, the most direct, if the most

dangerous, pathway into the high places :—

“ Whose lamps tremble continually  
With prayer sent up to God ;  
And where each need, reveal'd, expects  
Its patient period.”

For example, there was George Fox, the founder of a sect that seeks a knowledge of things divine in silence and immobility, who on one occasion fell into a trance which lasted fourteen days, and out of which he emerged with a changed personality.

Like Fox, who was the product of an utterly un-Greek environment, Socrates saw visions and heard voices. These signs of an intensely religious temperament, so familiar to all students of the lives of saints, whether ancient or modern, have been contemptuously discussed by those who see all things in the *siccum lumen* of an unimaginative mind. Thus, Macaulay (so well-defined by Carlyle as “an honest, good sort of fellow, made out of oatmeal”) has this unsympathetic, and therefore unenlightened, reference to Socrates in his diary of July, 1855 : “The stories of the oracle, the divine monitor, and the dreamer are absurd. I imagine that, with all his skill in logomachy, Socrates was

a strange, fanciful, superstitious old fellow. Extreme credulity has often gone with extreme logical subtlety. Witness some of the Schoolmen ; witness John Wesley." Socrates, as I have insisted, was a creature of his country and century, when it was universally believed that the deities of Olympus revealed their will to men by means of thunder or the flight and cries of birds and other phenomena, which we class as "natural," having attained a scientific conception of Nature that was unknown to Greek philosophers. According to Xenophon, Socrates thought that men should resort to divination when about to engage in enterprises which were beyond human control. Even when reasoning and experience were accepted by the average Athenian citizen as the only sure guides to right action, there remained in nooks and corners of his memory the debris of an old ritual of magic which might be compared with the uncouth lumps of stone still treasured in Greek temples in the Second Century A.D., when Pausanias visited them. The modern Londoner, who pays guineas to crystal-gazers, and makes obeisance to sweeps when he has backed a race-horse, and refuses to be the thirteenth guest at dinner, has less excuse for his faith in more

absurd omens. Plato, as may be gathered from a passage in the *Republic*, had little faith in divination and soothsaying and we cannot imagine him saying, as Tertullian did, that "the majority of men almost learn God from visions." Socrates was less superstitious than his contemporaries because he believed, in the light of his own experiences, that the will of the gods could be declared to one directly, not by external means. In this matter he was more enlightened than the Romans of a much later age, who never threw off the habit of fetish-worship, not even when their Empire became a ghostly dominion. It ill becomes a pious Christian, such as Macaulay was, to belittle Socrates for his belief in heaven-sent dreams, seeing that, as Dean Inge has pointed out in his invaluable history of Christian Mysticism, visions have played a much more important part in the life of the early Church than many ecclesiastical historians are willing to admit.

On several occasions in Plato's dramatic discussions, Socrates refers to visions as a means by which the will of the gods was revealed; *e.g.*, Apollo's behest that he himself should engage in disputation with others. Two examples of his visions are

given. In the *Phædo*, we learn that while in prison he composed a hymn to Apollo, and turned some fables of Æsop into verse because of a recurring dream in which, though the speaker's form changed, the words were always the same: "Socrates, cultivate the Muse." And in the *Crito*, we are told of a nocturnal vision, in which a tall, fair woman in white garments appeared to him and foretold the exact day of his death.

Socrates was convinced that the gods did actually condescend of their own free grace, and not merely in answer to prayer, to provide mortals with guidance in the ordinary affairs of life. This brings me to the most striking feature in the self-revealed psychology of Socrates—his firm conviction that a voice from within, some spiritual agent,<sup>1</sup> warned him from time to time against this or that course of action. "Ever since my boyhood," he says in the *Apology*, "I have had experience of a certain voice which, when it comes to me, always forbids me to do something which I am going to do, but never commands me to do anything." Plato and Xenophon are not in absolute agreement as to the precise scope of this supernatural guidance. The

<sup>1</sup> In the Greek, δαιμόνιον τι.

former always speaks of it as warning Socrates not to do what would be prejudicial to his welfare, whereas the latter asserts that it would also exhort him to do what should be done. As Professor Zeller has pointed out, the contradiction is more apparent than real, for if the divine monitor did not forbid any particular course of action, he could assume that it was divinely approved. It is easy to see why Socrates' belief in the divine origin of his warnings from within caused him to be charged with introducing strange gods. The orthodox theory was that the denizens of Olympus confined their intercourse with mortals to ceremonial occasions, and that no established deity would disestablish his (or her) official representatives by providing any individual with a regular supply of free oracles. It followed that Socrates' monitor, if really existent, must be what, in later ages, would have been called a devil or familiar spirit. The same point of view, though expressed in very different terms, is revealed in the perfectly honest conviction of Joan of Arc's accusers that her "Voices" were of diabolical origin.

What was the nature of the "sign" or "voice" in which Socrates had such implicit trust that it determined the whole

tenor of his life; debarring him, for example, from that absorption in politics which was held in ancient Athens—and perhaps in modern Athens, also!—to be the characteristic trait of a worthy citizen? The history of Christianity is thronged with sudden and portentous utterances which transfix the hearer's soul and transfigure it. Saul, on the road to Damascus, hears a voice from heaven, which changes him once and for all from a persecutor of Christians into the chief interpreter of Christ's teaching. Augustine, in the garden hears the direct command: "*Tolle et lege,*" and forthwith sets his feet on the straight and thorny path which climbs towards the shining, far-listening City of God. John Bunyan, busy with a game of tip-cat on Sunday, hears the explicit question from above, like thunder out of a clear sky: "Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell?"

The modern explanation of all such phenomena is based on the theory of the subliminal self. In his well-known book on the various kinds of religious experience William James says of the subliminal self: "Our intuitions, hypotheses, fancies, superstitions, persuasions, convictions, and,



in general, all our non-rational operations, come from it. It is the source of our dreams, and apparently they return to it. In it arise whatever mystical experiences we may have, and our automatisms, sensory or motor ; our life in hypnotic and "hypnoid" conditions, if we are subjects to such conditions ; our delusions, fixed ideas, and hysterical accidents, if we are hysteric subjects ; our supra-normal cognitions, if such there be, if we are telepathic subjects. It is also the fountain-head of much that feeds our religion. In persons deep in the religious life, as we have now abundantly seen—and this is my conclusion—the door into this region seems unusually wide open ; at any rate, experiences making their entrance through that door have had emphatic influence in shaping religious history." Since William James wrote the book from which this passage is taken, the mysterious domain he describes has been more systematically explored, a master-key to its mysteries having been found in the analysis of dreams. Freud and his followers must be numbered among the most successful explorers, though their eagerness to emphasise the importance of the sex motive has rendered their conclusions untrustworthy and caused psycho-

analysis to become in their hands a pseudo-science. Nevertheless, the practical psychologist, who makes a scientific use of his knowledge, seems to be able sometimes to cure a "complex" and "pluck from the heart a rooted sorrow," though it is still doubtful whether the results of this psychical surgery are permanent, and not doubtful at all that the remedy may be sometimes worse than the disease.

The voices heard by Saul on the road to Damascus, by St. Augustine and by John Bunyan were really subjective phenomena according to the theories of the psychoanalyst: being sudden and dramatic projections, so to speak, into the world without of decisive thoughts arrived at by a process of unconscious cerebration within. To me it seems that this theory that the still small voice of conscience may sometimes appear to be heard as a still great voice from without, as a trumpet-call in the far-listening dawn of a day of decision, does not confute our belief in the divine origin of such admonitions. It merely adds a link to the chain of cause and effect. If we believe, as Carlyle did, that everything is in the last analysis supernatural, that there is nothing so "ordinary" as not to be a miracle, then all such attempts at

rationalisation, can be dismissed as unreasonable. Personally, I am not anxious to deprive God of the privilege of direct communication with His creatures.

It is sufficient, however, to regard the "sign" or "inner oracle" of Socrates as what we call the voice of conscience. With most men, whose thoughts are governed by considerations of self-interest—a Protean motive which can easily assume the form of a virtuous intention—this voice is seldom overheard; it is a case of low audibility. Yet even the most careless person, when contemplating some base action, is apt to be suddenly arrested and dissuaded by a warning from within, imperative if inarticulate. The process of unconscious cerebration, the secret argument between Just Reason and Unjust Reason, has suddenly reached the right conclusion; the powers that make for righteousness have at last prevailed. He feels in the quick of his soul a pang of certainty, half emotion and half thought, that he must not, cannot, be guilty of so base an act. With men of a "tender conscience," in the habit of considering each intention in its moral aspect, the voice of conscience is heard rather than

overheard, renders its decisive verdicts without delay, and in the end becomes a perpetual inspiration to right conduct. Such men are never numerous even in a Christian community, where everybody has been taught to seek spiritual guidance from within as well as from without. In fifth-century Athens, which had but lately emerged from the primitive stage when religion is a system of propitiating external spirits, they must have been rare indeed and inexplicable to their neighbours. If the voice of conscience was not Socrates' discovery, he was the first of the Hellenes to discover the spiritual advantages of revering it as divine and oracular (as indeed it is) and of making it the guide and guard of daily conduct.

### III

I am almost inclined to add that Socrates discovered the immortality of the soul as we to-day accept it. Even in his day, it is true, the dismal Hereafter of the Homeric poems, where but a few illustrious heroes enjoy the isles of the blest while the rest of the dead are fleeting

gibbering ghosts, or Hesiod's hardly less gloomy after-death existence, in which a few righteous spirits become guardian angels, had given place to representations in the Mysteries or "underground" religion of a future state of rewards and punishments. How else can the ways of God be justified to man (such was the trend of popular belief) since, without such a future state, great criminals who had lived and died in prosperity would escape the divine vengeance for their crimes and the virtuous who lived and died in wretchedness would not be compensated. If the gods were just, they must deal out justice after death. If Pericles in his Funeral Oration hints at nothing more than the immortality of fame, yet Pindar and the tragedians always assume a life after death either in the depths or in the heights. Whether or not the formal, philosophic arguments adduced by Plato for a belief in the survival of the soul were derived from, or even suggested by Socrates' own teaching is a question worth asking, never to be finally answered. But I feel sure that the three great "myths" (in the *Phædo*, the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*) which describe the destiny of souls in a future life, depict

the other-worldly wonders which Socrates himself had seen with those eyes of the soul, which men call imagination. Probably his visions were elaborated in his disciple's versions. All the greater Sophists were in the habit of illustrating their lectures with fables or allegories; so Plato shows Protagoras relating his story of Prometheus and Epimetheus, which may have been well known to his pupils, in the Dialogue called after his name. These wandering professors of wisdom naturally preferred a monologue to a disputation, and must have relied upon their "painted parables" not only to fix the attention of an audience, but also, since they would be quoted, to attract new pupils.

Socrates, especially as he is presented in the *Republic*, makes an effective use of fables and continuous images, and some of his illustrative tales, *e.g.* that of the noble captain, the pilot, and the mutinous sailors, which represent the relations of the better part of society and the philosopher to the mob of politicians, recall the parables of the New Testament. None of them, however, has the concentrated dramatic force of the parable of the Prodigal Son which is a model of what a

short story should be, not a word being wasted. There is a touch of irony in some of the Socrates parables, *e.g.* in that of the pilot plying between Athens and Ægina who charges only a small payment for saving men from drowning, because he is uncertain whether it is better for them to live or die. The allegory of the Cave is an admirable example of an enacted metaphor, in which the previous abstract discussion of the nature and degrees of knowledge is recapitulated in the form of a picture. The three great "Myths" in which the destiny of the dead is described are nearer in manner and matter to the *Pilgrim's Progress* than anything else in Greek literature. Both of them are inspired by a passionate confidence in the divine justice, which fuses into a perfect whole the material gathered from various sources, but chiefly from the Mysteries and Orphic rituals. There is an Oriental element in them which has prompted the suggestion that Socrates, with his un-Greek physique and asceticism, was of Eastern descent. Each of the three has its own peculiar charm and particular value. The myth of the *Gorgias*, like the Sixth Book of the *Æneid*, seems to contain direct reminiscences of the mysteries.

That in the *Phædo* begins with the beautiful fancy, unfamiliar to the Greeks who relegated all the souls of the dead to an underworld, that the upper reaches of the sky are heaven and a glorified earth in one. As the fishes live in the ocean, so men dwell in a lower sphere, which is to the heavenly earth what deserts and sea beaches are to us, and now and again put up their heads and catch momentary glimpses of a better and braver world. Indeed this myth marks that new orientation of human hopes, which transferred the happy Hereafter from the abyss to the sunlit sky and the Golden Age from the past into the future. But the myth in the *Republic*, which has inspired all the poet-eschatologists from Virgil to Dante, is the most subtle and consistent of the three and by far the most realistic, thanks to the many touches that recall the experiences of earthly living, and it is for these reasons that I give it in full as a memorable and momentous picture of the world to come as Socrates imagined it. Socrates himself is speaking :

“ Well, I said, I will tell you a tale ; not one of the tales which Odysseus tells to the hero Alcinous, yet this too is a tale of a hero, Er the son of Armenius, a



Pamphylian by birth. He was slain in battle, and ten days afterwards, when the bodies of the dead were taken up already in a state of corruption, his body was found unaffected by decay, and carried away home to be buried. And on the twelfth day, as he was lying on the funeral pile, he returned to life and told them what he had seen in the other world. He said that when his soul left the body he went on a journey with a great company, and that they came to a mysterious place at which there were two openings in the earth; they were near together, and over against them were two other openings in the heaven above. In the intermediate space there were judges seated, who commanded the just, after they had given judgment on them and had bound their sentences in front of them, to ascend by the heavenly way on the right hand; and in like manner the unjust were bidden by them to descend by the lower way on the left hand; these also bore the symbols of their deeds, but fastened on their backs. He drew near, and they told him that he was to be the messenger who would carry the report of the other world to men, and they bade him hear and see all that was to be heard and seen in that place. Then he

beheld and saw on one side the souls departing at either opening of heaven and earth when sentence had been given on them; and at the two other openings other souls, some ascending out of the earth dusty and worn with travel, some descending out of heaven clean and bright. And arriving ever and anon they seemed to have come from a long journey, and they went forth with gladness into the meadow, where they encamped as at a festival; and those who knew one another embraced and conversed, the souls which came from earth curiously inquiring about the things above, and the souls which came from heaven about the things beneath. And they told one another of what had happened by the way, those from below weeping and sorrowing at the remembrance of the things which they had endured and seen in their journey beneath the earth (now the journey lasted a thousand years), while those from above were describing heavenly delights and visions of inconceivable beauty. The story, Glaucon, would take too long to tell; but the sum was this: He said that for every wrong which they had done to any one they suffered tenfold; or once in a hundred years—such being reckoned to be the

length of man's life, and the penalty being thus paid ten times in a thousand years. If, for example, there were any who had been the cause of many deaths, or had betrayed or enslaved cities or armies, or been guilty of any other evil behaviour, for each and all of their offences they received punishment ten times over, and the rewards of beneficence and justice and holiness were in the same proportion. I need hardly repeat what he said concerning young children dying almost as soon as they were born. Of piety and impiety to gods and parents, and of murderers,<sup>1</sup> there were retributions other and greater far which he described. He mentioned that he was present when one of the spirits asked another, 'Where is Ardiæus the Great?' (Now this Ardiæus lived a thousand years before the time of Er: he had been the tyrant of some city of Pamphylia, and had murdered his aged father and his elder brother, and was said to have committed many other abominable crimes.) The answer of the other spirit was: 'He comes not hither and will never come. And this,' said he, 'was one of the dreadful sights which we ourselves witnessed. We were at the mouth of the

<sup>1</sup> Reading

cavern, and, having completed all our experiences, were about to re-ascend, when of a sudden Ardiæus appeared and several others, most of whom were tyrants; and there were also besides the tyrants private individuals who had been great criminals: they were just, as they fancied, about to return into the upper world, but the mouth, instead of admitting them, gave a roar, whenever any of these incurable sinners or some one who had not been sufficiently punished tried to ascend; and Ardiæus and others they bound head and foot and hand, and threw them down and flayed them with scourges, and dragged them along the road at the side, carding them on thorns like wool, and declaring to the passers-by what were their crimes, and that they were being taken away to be cast into hell. And of all the many terrors which they had endured, he said that there was none like the terror which each of them felt at that moment, lest they should hear the voice; and when there was silence, one by one they ascended with exceeding joy. These, said Er, were the penalties and retributions, and there were blessings as great.

“Now when the spirits which were in the meadow had tarried seven days, on the

eighth they were obliged to proceed on their journey, and, on the fourth day after, he said that they came to a place where they could see from above a line of light, straight as a column, extending right through the whole heaven and through the earth, in colour resembling the rainbow, only brighter and purer; another day's journey brought them to the place, and there, in the midst of the light, they saw the ends of the chains of heaven let down from above: for this light is the belt of heaven, and holds together the circle of the universe, like the under-girders of a trireme. From these ends is extended the spindle of Necessity, on which all the revolutions turn. The shaft and hook of this spindle are made of steel, and the whorl is made partly of steel and also partly of other materials. Now the whorl is in form like the whorl used on earth; and the description of it implied that there is one large hollow whorl which is quite scooped out, and into this is fitted another lesser one, and another, and another, and four others, making eight in all, like vessels which fit into one another; the whorls show their edges on the upper side, and on their lower side all together form one continuous

whorl. This is pierced by the spindle, which is driven home through the centre of the eighth. The first and outermost whorl has the rim broadest, and the seven inner whorls are narrower, in the following proportions—the sixth is next to the first in size, the fourth next to the sixth; then comes the eight; the seventh is fifth, the fifth is sixth, the third is seventh, last and eighth comes the second. The largest (or fixed stars) is spangled, and the seventh (or sun) is brightest; the eighth (or moon) coloured by the reflected light of the seventh; the second and fifth (Saturn and Mercury) are in colour like one another, and yellower than the preceding; the third (Venus) has the whitest light; the fourth (Mars) is reddish; the sixth (Jupiter) is in whiteness second. Now the whole spindle has the same motion; but, as the whole revolves in one direction, the seven inner circles move slowly in the other, and of these the swiftest is the eighth; next in swiftness are the seventh, sixth, and fifth, which move together; third in swiftness appeared to move according to the law of this reversed motion the fourth; the third appeared fourth and the second fifth. The spindle turns on the knees of Necessity; and on the upper surface of each circle is

a siren, who goes round with them, hymning a single tone or note. The eight together form one harmony; and round about, at equal intervals, there is another band, three in number, each sitting upon her throne: these are the Fates, daughters of Necessity, who are clothed in white robes and have chaplets upon their heads, Lachesis and Clotho and Atropos, who accompany with their voices the harmony of the sirens—Lachesis singing of the past, Clotho of the present, Atropos of the future; Clotho from time to time assisting with a touch of her right hand the revolution of the outer circle of the whorl or spindle, and Atropos with her left hand touching and guiding the inner ones, and Lachesis laying hold of either in turn, first with one hand and then with the other.

“When Er and the spirits arrived, their duty was to go at once to Lachesis; but first of all there came a prophet who arranged them in order; then he took from the knees of Lachesis lots and samples of lives, and having mounted a high pulpit, spoke as follows: ‘Hear the word of Lachesis, the daughter of Necessity. Mortal souls, behold a new cycle of life and mortality. Your genius will not be

allotted to you, but you will choose your genius ; and let him who draws the first lot have the first choice, and the life which he chooses shall be his destiny. Virtue is free, and as a man honours or dishonours her he will have more or less of her ; the responsibility is with the chooser—God is justified.’ When the Interpreter had thus spoken he scattered lots indifferently among them all, and each of them took up the lot which fell near him, all but Er himself (he was not allowed), and each as he took his lot perceived the number which he had obtained. Then the Interpreter placed on the ground before them the samples of lives ; and there were many more lives than the souls present, and they were of all sorts. There were lives of every animal and of man in every condition. And there were tyrannies among them, some lasting out the tyrant’s life, others which broke off in the middle and came to an end in poverty and exile and beggary ; and there were lives of famous men, some who were famous for their form and beauty as well as for their strength and success in games, or, again, for their birth and the qualities of their ancestors ; and some who were the reverse of famous for the opposite qualities. And



of women likewise ; there were not, however, any definite character in them, because the soul, when choosing a new life, must of necessity become different. But there was every other quality, and they all mingled with one another, and also with elements of wealth and poverty, and disease and health ; and there were many states also. And here, my dear Glaucon, is the supreme peril of our human state ; and therefore the utmost care should be taken. Let each one of us leave every other kind of knowledge and seek and follow one thing only, if peradventure he may be able to learn and may find some one who will make him able to learn and discern between good and evil, and so to choose always and everywhere the better life as he has opportunity. He should consider the bearing of all these things which have been mentioned severally and collectively upon virtue ; he should know what the effect of beauty is when combined with poverty or wealth in a particular soul, and what are the good and evil consequences of noble and humble birth, of private and public station, of strength and weakness, of cleverness and dullness, and of all the natural and acquired gifts of the soul, and the

operation of them when conjoined ; he will then look at the nature of the soul, and from the consideration of all these qualities he will be able to determine which is the better and which is the worse ; and so he will choose, giving the name of evil to the life which will make his soul more unjust, and good to the life which will make his soul more just ; all else he will disregard. For we have seen and know that this is the best choice both in life and after death. A man must take with him into the world below an adamantine faith in truth and right, that there too, he may be undazzled by the desire of wealth or the other allurements of evil, lest, coming upon tyrannies and similar villainies, he do irremediable wrongs to others and suffer yet worse himself ; but let him know how to choose the mean and avoid the extremes on either side, as far as possible, not only in this life but in all that which is to come. For this is the way of happiness.

“And according to the report of the messenger from the other world this was what the prophet said at the time : ‘ Even for the last comer, if he chooses wisely and will live diligently, there is appointed a happy and not undesirable existence. Let

not him who chooses first be careless, and let not the last despair.' And when he had spoken, he who had the first choice came forward and in a moment chose the greatest tyranny; his mind having been darkened by folly and sensuality, he had not thought out the whole matter before he chose, and did not at first sight perceive that he was fated, among other evils, to devour his own children. But when he had time to reflect, and saw what was in the lot, he began to beat his breast and lament over his choice, forgetting the proclamation of the prophet; for, instead of throwing the blame of his misfortune on himself, he accused chance and the gods, and everything rather than himself. Now he was one of those who came from heaven, and in a former life had dwelt in a well-ordered State, but his virtue was a matter of habit only, and he had no philosophy. And it was true of others who were similarly overtaken, that the greater number of them came from heaven and therefore they had never been schooled by trial, whereas the pilgrims who came from earth having themselves suffered and ~~seen~~ others suffer were not in a hurry to choose. And owing to this inexperience of theirs, and also because the lot was a

chance, many of the souls exchanged a good destiny for an evil or an evil for a good. For if a man had always on his arrival in this world dedicated himself from the first to sound philosophy, and had been moderately fortunate in the number of the lot, he might, as the messenger reported, be happy here, and also his journey to another life and return to this, instead of being rough and underground, would be smooth and heavenly. Most curious, he said, was the spectacle—sad and laughable and strange; for the choice of the souls was in most cases based on their experience of a previous life. There he saw the soul which had once been Orpheus choosing the life of a swan out of enmity to the race of women, hating to be born of a woman because they had been his murderers; he beheld also the soul of Thamyras choosing the life of a nightingale; birds, on the other hand, like the swan and other musicians, wanting to be men. The soul which obtained the twentieth lot chose the life of a lion, and this was the soul of Ajax the son of Telamon, who would not be a man, remembering the injustice which was done him in the judgment about the arms. The next was Agamemnon, who took the life of an eagle, because,

like Ajax, he hated human nature by reason of his sufferings. About the middle came the lot of Atalanta ; she, seeing the great fame of an athlete, was unable to resist the temptation : and after her there followed the soul of Epeus the son of Panopeus passing into the nature of a woman cunning in the arts ; and far away among the last who chose, the soul of the jester Thersites was putting on the form of a monkey. There came also the soul of Odysseus having yet to make a choice, and his lot happened to be the last of them all. Now the recollection of former toils had disenchanted him of ambition, and he went about for a considerable time in search of the life of a private man who had no cares ; he had some difficulty in finding this, which was lying about and had been neglected by everybody else ; and when he saw it, he said that he would have done the same had his lot been first instead of last, and that he was delighted to have it. And not only did men pass into animals, but I must also mention that there were animals tame and wild who changed into one another and into corresponding human natures—the good into the gentle and the evil into the savage, in all sorts of combinations.

“ All the souls had now chosen their lives, and they went in the order of their choice to Lachesis, who sent with them the genius whom they had severally chosen, to be the guardian of their lives and the fulfiller of the choice : this genius led the souls first to Clotho, and drew them within the revolution of the spindle impelled by her hand, thus ratifying the destiny of each ; and then, when they were fastened to this, carried them to Atropos, who spun the threads and made them irreversible, whence without turning round they passed beneath the throne of Necessity ; and when they had all passed, they marched on in a scorching heat to the plain of Forgetfulness, which was a barren waste destitute of trees and verdure ; and then towards evening they encamped by the river of Unmindfulness, whose water no vessel can hold ; of this they were all obliged to drink a certain quantity, and those who were not saved by wisdom drank more than was necessary ; and each one as he drank forgot all things. Now after they had gone to rest, about the middle of the night there was a thunder-storm and earthquake, and then in an instant they were driven upwards in all manner of ways to their birth, like stars

shooting. He himself was hindered from drinking the water. But in what manner or by what means he returned to the body he could not say ; only, in the morning, awaking suddenly, he found himself lying on the pyre."

THE trial, condemnation, and execution of Socrates constitute one of those historical puzzles which can never be solved to our complete satisfaction. Even Athens found it inexplicable when she realised what had actually happened. Indeed, it was more difficult for the average Athenian to find a plausible explanation when the deed was done than for us, who can look back on so many dark centuries, the darkness of which is made visible by flaming "acts of faith," an almost unbroken sequence of fires kindled for the death of offenders against various forms of orthodoxy. It was not the vengeance of an outraged priesthood which slew Socrates; still less was it the anxious care of benevolent ecclesiastics (resembling the white-haired Inquisitor in Mr. Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*) to prevent the spread of a soul-destroying heresy. The Athenians were not religious fanatics. Aristophanes had been allowed to make fun of the gods with impunity. Thus, in the *Birds*, Peis-thetairus suggests that the birds should build a Babylon in the sky and starve the



gods into submission to their will by intercepting the supplies of sacrificial smoke ; that they should also send an envoy to Zeus, demanding his abdication, and forbidding him and the other deities of Olympus to trespass on their atmospheric realm in order to pay scandalous visits to a succession of Alcmenas and Semeles. The innumerable adulteries of Zeus, his disguises, his prodigious amours, are the material out of which laughter-provoking farce is concocted. Similarly, the dread divinities of the underworld are presented as comical old bogies, and hell as a theatrical show expressly designed to frighten simple-minded folk. In the *Frogs*, we find Æacus abusing Dionysius as a shameless rogue who had stolen his watch-dog, Cerberus. Sophocles and even Æschylus did not respect the current mythology, while Euripides openly proclaimed : " It is law that bids us believe in the gods." There can be no doubt that Socrates, though as little inclined as the more intelligent among his fellow-citizens to accept the disgraceful stories about the gods told by Homer and Hesiod, was never as outspoken as Aristophanes in his criticisms of the current mythology.

The difficulty is not to explain why the

mass of ignorant voters who passed sentence of death were persuaded of the truth of the indictment, which was framed in the following terms: "Socrates is guilty of the offence of not recognising the gods of the city and of introducing other and strange deities; he is also guilty of corrupting the youth. Penalty, Death." We have two records, written after Socrates' death, by Xenophon and Plato, of the proceedings before the mob of five hundred dicasts or jurymen. The law under which the accusation was brought was a decree introduced by Diopetides, in order to strike a blow against Pericles and Anaxagoras, which declared that action should be taken against all persons who did not believe in the gods or who put forth new theories about heavenly matters. A wide net, and easily flung about a lofty head! The accusers or, as we should call them, counsel for the prosecution, were Meletus, representing the poets, Anytus, the craftsmen and politicians, and Lycus the orators. The first and second had a private grudge against the accused; the second and third were in a sense professional rivals. All three knew how to play on the mentality of the herd, and they certainly went the right way to work in their arguments to

persuade the five-hundred-headed beast with its rudimentary intelligence (less, perhaps, than that of the least intelligent of its atoms and items) that Socrates was a most dangerous innovator. To-day, though no thinking man believes the stories of Noah's Ark and of Jonah and the whale, it would not be necessary to go to the cultureless zones of America to find an assembly which would condemn a minister who publicly proclaimed his disbelief—not because the majority present hold them to be true, but because of the general conviction that no scriptural statement must be publicly described as untrue. The good old lady who rebuked her daughter for scoffing at Nebuchadnezzar—"a person in the Holy Bible, my dear, who must be spoken of reverently"—is an undying type, which was probably strongly represented among the "five hundred seamen" (Fouillée, in his *Socrate*), who condemned Socrates. Moreover, the rank-and-file of a city's population know nothing of the death of old ideas and the birth of new ones, and they are apt to be shocked when it is suddenly brought home to them that the whole basis of their religious life, the doctrine in which they were brought up as children, has been destroyed. Hence, the

horror of the Fundamentalists at the Theory of Evolution, the far-reaching significance of which has only just been revealed to well-meaning men who really believe, as their fathers did, that the Bible in its English form was handed down direct from Heaven and that even the commas in it (as a Fundamentalist preacher is reported to have said) are indications of the divine will. It is easy to understand why the Athenian dicasts, under the influence of the three adroit accusers, were persuaded that Socrates, who had the audacity to say he had a god inside him, was the person chiefly responsible for the attempt to deprive them of their traditional beliefs. The only surprising thing about the verdict of "Guilty" was the smallness of the majority in favour of it. No doubt, Socrates forgave them because they knew not; he had had a life-long experience of the ignorance of well-meaning men.

The real difficulty is to explain why the decree of Diopeithes was ever invoked to destroy him. That private animosities were at work is obvious enough; a numerous company of teachers and orators, whom he had worsted in argument, must have been eager to see an end made of so successful a rival. Moreover, the fact that

he refused payment for his teaching, whereas they were glad to get it, would cause him to be regarded as modern Trade Unionists regard a "black leg" (one of the few terms of personal reprobation which were unknown to ancient rhetoricians!). All these subtle motives made for his destruction, but it was, I think, the popular desire to find a scapegoat for the disasters of the Peloponnesian War which caused him to be indicted. Athens had recently experienced the bitterest humiliations in the miserable end of the Sicilian Expeditionary Force and the closing catastrophes which put her at the mercy of Sparta who, as the envoys to Melos had foreseen in 416,<sup>1</sup> proved more merciful than stupid and unforgiving Thebes would have been. She had seen her Long Walls pulled down, and a Spartan garrison established in the Acropolis. She had tasted an even more bitter humiliation in the bloodthirsty rule of the Thirty, who tried to wipe out the whole democratic leadership. The history of Thucydides had not yet appeared to explain to her (if she would attend to

<sup>1</sup> "We feel no uneasiness about the end of our Empire, even if it should come to an end," said the envoys, "for a fellow-Empire, like Lacedæmon—though it is not she who is our real foe—is not so terrible to the vanquished as desperate subjects who rise in revolt against their rulers"

any such explanation) the real causes of her downfall. She had become a tyrant city and had incurred the doom which overweening pride<sup>1</sup> had brought on so many tyrants in the tragedies presented in her theatre. Her tragedy began, though she knew it not, when, to meet the increasing expenses of the war, she treated the charter of her Empire—the contract which had been drawn up two generations before between herself and her confederates by Aristides the Just—as a mere “scrap of paper” by doubling the annual payments at the suggestion of Cleon, her evil genius. Thucydides’ story, cast in the form of an imaginary dialogue, of her negotiations with the Melians in 416, exhibits her as a tyrannical power indeed, ruthlessly acting on the maxim that might is right. Melos, a small, rocky island with Dorian traditions, lay outside the net of Athenian sea-power and had kept its freedom for seven hundred years. “Of the gods we believe,” the Athenian exponents of *real-politik* are made to say, “and of men we know, that by a necessary law of their nature they rule wherever they can.” But the Melians put their trust in the justice of the gods, which had preserved their harmless little city so

<sup>1</sup> ὕβρις.

long, and in the help of the Spartans, men of their own race, and fought valiantly for their freedom. Neither gods nor men came to their rescue, and when they were forced to surrender at discretion, the conquerors put all the grown men to death and sold the women and children into slavery. Athenian settlers took possession of the little steep island valleys and the hillside vineyards, and those who died in a forlorn hope of freedom seemed for ever forgotten, save by those unseen powers of whom the poet sang: "by their great memories the gods are known." It was now the policy of Athens to levy no more war-taxes at home, but live by naval warfare, seizing the wealth of others, "from the Black Sea to Sardinia," as Cleon advised. A few months after the sack of Melos, she sent her great Armada into the golden west, to exact a vast tribute from Syracuse and the rich island of Sicily. She forgot that "it takes a city to conquer a city," that the greatest of landing parties could not hope to succeed in such a colossal adventure. The destruction of her expeditionary forces involved the loss of an empire held by force, and her own downfall, though it was not until 405 that the shattering naval defeat of Ægospotami left her at the mercy of her

enemies. But few, even of the most god-fearing Athenians, would regard these irrecoverable disasters as penalties imposed by the just, unforgetful gods for the overweening pride, which had caused them to forget the rule of "Nothing too much" in its application to statecraft. The gods had been offended, they preferred to believe, by the innovators in thought who challenged the ancient sanctions of customary religion and morality. And having decided there was need of a human sacrifice, that it was expedient one man should die for the people, they chose Socrates as the victim. With the invisible instigators of the prosecution—that small minority which sways the masses, especially in an extreme democracy—it was political rancour, not theological hatred, which determined the choice. Thus his belief that it was absurd to appoint the leaders of the State by lot was thought to prove his contempt for a democratic constitution. It was remembered that he often quoted the Homeric passage in which Odysseus is shown cudgelling the noisy rank-and-file with his sceptre, bidding them listen to their betters and remember that all men cannot be kings. This was taken as a proof that he despised the common people, and wished they could be controlled



by violent means. Then, he had been intimately associated, as a master among his pupils, with the arch-traitor Alcibiades, whose crafty advice to the Spartan commanders had so greatly weakened the economic position of Athens at a critical stage of the war, and with Critias, Charmides, and others whose sympathy with oligarchical theories was only too well-known. According to Æschines, his association with Critias, the bloodthirsty chief of the Thirty Tyrants, whose "Reign of Terror" had cost the lives of 1,500 honest citizens, was the sole reason why Socrates was tried and put to death. It was conveniently forgotten that he had tried to shame Critias out of a "swinish passion" for Euthydemus and so incurred the bitter enmity of that ruthless revolutionary who, when in power, had tried to gag him and put an end to his career as a public teacher.

The *Apology* of Plato,<sup>1</sup> who was present at the trial, reproduces his defence from memory. But it is not preceded by a picture of the scene, when the sturdy old man faced his judges, a spring morning twenty-three centuries ago. No Greek

<sup>1</sup> The "Apology" attributed to Xenophon is probably spurious.

reader required a description of such a familiar spectacle. The jurors were all paid a decent day's wage for their work, without which, as we know from a remark of the chorus in Aristophanes' *Wasps*: "If the courts are not sitting, what shall we do for a breakfast?" they might have had to seek a job of manual work, or borrow the price of a meal from a friend. They were bound by oath to judge according to the laws and decrees of the Athenian people, to give both sides an impartial hearing, and to render a verdict on the point at issue, without reference to any extraneous matter whatsoever. There can be no doubt they used their fateful counters—one with a hole in it for acquittal; the other, with a thick axle, for condemnation—without fear or favour, as a rule; no complaints of corruption or unfairness in individual cases are on record, though Diodorus says the first instance occurred in 409 B.C. They were massed together on long benches facing the two platforms on which stood the plaintiffs and the defendant. The King Archon, a dignified shadow of the priest-judge-king of ancient times, was there to see that order was kept. Professional advocates were not permitted, though prepared speeches could be pur-

chased. In an ordinary case the theory of Pericles, who instituted the custom of paying jurymen, that nimble wits count for more than knowledge of routine, worked out very well indeed. But in such trials as that of Socrates there was an  $x$  in the personal equation—the incalculable factor of a “complex” in the public mind which worked against the defendant at every point.

Socrates did not prepare a formal defence. Xenophon declares in the *Memorabilia* that he would certainly have been acquitted, “if he had been willing in any moderate degree to conciliate the dicasts.” They naturally looked for some sort of an elaborated speech, such as might be expected from any defendant properly impressed by a sense of his position and their importance. They would be as much prejudiced against him by his improvised reply to the indictment as a modern Scottish congregation by an obviously unprepared sermon. Xenophon also tells us, on the authority of Hermogenes, that Socrates had been forbidden by his divine monitor to prepare a defence, and that he himself thought it unnecessary to do so, on the ground that his whole life had been a preparation for that hour. So his speech

was in the loose and desultory style in which he was wont to speak "in the agora and among the tables of the money-changers," and was naturally regarded by the dicasts as not so much a defence as a defiance. Plato's version of it has been compared with the imaginary speeches, true in the spirit if not in the letter, by means of which Thucydides conveys his conception of the lofty character and wise policy of Pericles, and at the same time provides a commentary on the state of affairs from the historian's point of view. But the conversational manner, the lack of artistic arrangement, and the flavour of Socratic irony make for the belief that we are listening, now and again, to the actual voice from the platform, which was really a kind of pillory. And we seem to hear, between its significant passages, the menacing murmurs of the mob now and again rising to a roar of hatred and scorn.

The *Apology* falls into three parts: firstly, the defence proper; secondly, the shorter address in mitigation of the penalty; thirdly, the prophetic peroration. Socrates begins by paying an ironical compliment to his accusers, whose speeches have been so persuasive as almost to make him think he

must be somebody else. (Like the poor woman with her petticoats cut round about, he might say: "This is none of I.") They have uttered hardly a word of truth, but the most amazing of their many falsehoods was their warning to the jury not to be misled by the force of his eloquence! This of a man who is over seventy and is appearing in a court of law for the first time, and is quite a stranger to the kind of rhetoric in vogue there! He can hardly be expected to appear in the rôle of a juvenile orator, making his first effort at forensic eloquence, so they must be kind enough to bear with his colloquial manner and think only of the truth of his plain words.

He has to deal with old accusations, more dangerous than those of Anytus and his associates, which began when his hearers were children and more impressible than they are now. He must try to clear away in a short time slanders which have been current for many years. These could be summed up in an affidavit: Socrates is an evil-doer and a curious person who searches into things under the earth and in the heavens, and he makes the worse appear the better cause; and he teaches the aforesaid doctrines to others. But the

truth is that he has nothing to do with physical speculations, and there are many present who can bear witness that it is so.

Here Socrates appeals to those who have been his hearers, and they confirm the truth of his statement.

From what these witnesses say of that part of the charge, the dicasts can judge what the rest is worth. There is as little foundation for the report that he is a teacher and takes money for his teaching. If a man really could teach wisdom, to do so for money would be an honourable vocation. But he leaves that to Gorgias and Prodicus and Hippias, who go the rounds of the cities, attracting the young men, and such men as the Parian philosopher, Evenus, who is staying in Athens and charges only five minæ for a course in wisdom. He himself would be proud, even conceited, if he were like Evenus. But the truth is that he has no such knowledge to impart.

He now comes to a startling turn in his defence, and asks the men of Athens not to interrupt him. He calls a god as witness—the God of Delphi! One can imagine the roar of indignation at this reference. Chærephon, a good democrat who had shared in the recent exile of the people

and had returned with them, was known to be an impulsive person. He had gone to Delphi and boldly asked the oracle to tell him whether anybody was wiser than Socrates, and the Pythian prophetess had replied that there was no wiser man. Chærephon is dead, but his brother is in court, and can vouch for the truth of what he is saying.

He mentions this response of the oracle, because it puzzled him and compelled him to enter on an inquiry which made him many dangerous enemies and gave occasion to many calumnies. Knowing very well he had no wisdom, small or great, he could not understand why Apollo should say he was the wisest of men. So he started on a search to discover a man who was wiser than himself. First of all he sought out a politician, who was thought wise by many and wiser still by himself, and to his surprise discovered that his reputed wisdom was a sham. Trying to convince him that he was not really wise, he incurred the politician's enmity and that of his friends, who heard the argument. And whether his inquisition involved politicians or poets or craftsmen, the result was the same—the wiser a man was thought, the more foolish he turned out to be, and in every

case the attempt to convince him of his folly, for his own and the world's sake, added to the number of the inquirer's enemies and slanderers.

"The truth is, O men of Athens," the defendant goes on to say, and here we may be listening to the very words of the veritable Socrates, "that the god only is wise, and by his answer he intends to show that the wisdom of men is of little or no worth. He is not really referring to Socrates, he is merely using my name by way of illustration—as though he said: He, O men, is the wisest who knows that his wisdom is really and truly of no value at all. And so, I go about the world, obedient to the god, and search and make inquiry into the wisdom of anyone who seems to be wise, whether he be an Athenian or an alien. If he be not wise, then in vindication of the oracle I show him he has not wisdom. And this occupation absolutely absorbs me, leaving me no time for public or private affairs and plunging me in utter poverty, which is the price of my devotion to the god."

Next he explains the origin of the charge that he corrupts young men. The sons of rich fathers, who have not much to do, follow him about to hear him expose



pretenders to wisdom, learn his method of examination, and apply it to the many persons who think they know something, but really know little or nothing. Their victims are angry with *him*, not with themselves; so they talk of the pestilent doctrines of Socrates and his corrupting influences on the young. Asked to point to any of his acts and doctrines which tend to have this effect, they can find nothing definite against the "villainous misleader of youth," and are compelled to repeat the old, ready-made charges, which are used against all philosophers, of teaching about things up in the air and down in the earth, and having no gods, and making the worse appear the better cause. This gives such as Meletus his chance, who declares that Socrates is a doer of evil and a corrupter of youth, who does not believe in the gods of the state, but has other new divinities of his own.

He calls Meletus to draw near and be interrogated, and the least reputable of the three accusers is easily worsted by the great dialectician. It is true the nets thrown about his accuser's head are woven of sophisms, but there is a touch of irony in them, which justifies the plan of hoisting the engineer with his own petard. He

forces Meletus to call him an atheist, which is obviously a contradiction of the charge that he cultivated new gods of his own. Moreover, Meletus accuses him of teaching that "the sun is a stone and the moon mere earth," which is, of course, the old confusion about Anaxagoras. The Athenian people could not be so ignorant as to attribute to Socrates notions which had found their way into the drama and could be learned by any theatre-goer. The weakest part of his defence hereabouts is that in which he deals with the evil lives of some of his disciples. The names of Alcibiades, Critias, and Charmides were detestable, as they well deserved to be, to the newly-restored democracy which had suffered so much at the hands of the oligarchical faction. It was not a sufficient answer to say he had never professed to teach them anything and so was not justly chargeable with being an accessory before the fact, so to speak, of their crimes. Taken out of the ironical form, however, his defence was sound enough; for his teaching certainly had nothing to do with the evil lives of these three, when they were no longer subject to his personal influence.

By the irony of circumstances, what seems to us (who have had many more

centuries of training in philosophical concepts than any of the early Athenian thinkers) the least satisfactory part of his defence was the most effective with the mob of dicasts. But, when Meletus is disposed of, the note of defiance of worldly considerations rings out like a trumpet-call. Socrates is not in the least ashamed of a course of life which is likely to bring him to an untimely end. He recalls (having the Homeric poems by heart and at heart always) the warning of Thetis, his goddess mother to Achilles, when he was so eager to avenge the death of Patroclus by slaying his slayer: "Fate waits for you next after Hector," and the hero's reply: "Let me die at once so I be avenged of my enemy rather than abide here in safety by the beaked ships, a laughing-stock to men and burdensome to earth." Socrates had remained at the posts of danger assigned to him by the commanders at Potidæa and Amphipolis and Delium. Is it likely that fear of death, which is but a pretence of wisdom, being a pretence of knowing the unknown, would deter him from carrying on his divinely-ordained mission?

"If you say to me," he cries, "Anytus has not convinced us, and we let you go on condition that you no longer give your

life to your quest, that you abandon the pursuit of philosophy, I have only one possible reply. I must say—‘Men of Athens, I honour and love you, but in this matter it is God, not you, whom I shall obey. As long as I breathe and have my strength, I shall never turn away from philosophy, nor cease from my manner of exhortation. To any one of you whom I meet I shall say as before: You, my friend—a citizen of our great and mighty and wise city of Athens—are you not ashamed of heaping up all the money and honour and renown you can get, and at the same time caring nothing about wisdom and truth and the soul’s welfare, which is nothing to you at all? And if the person with whom I am arguing says: Yes, but I do care about these things; then I do not leave him or let him go, but examine and cross-examine him after my custom. If I think he has no virtue in him, but only says he has, then I rebuke him for undervaluing the greater and over-valuing the less. And I shall repeat the same words to all whom I meet, young and old, citizens or aliens, but especially to my fellow-citizens who are my brethren. For wit ye well that this is the behest of the god; and I hold that no greater good has ever

occurred in the state than this my service to the god. For I do nothing evil, but go about persuading you, old and young alike, not to take thought for your persons or properties, but first and foremost to do the best and most for your soul's welfare. I tell you, virtue is not given by money, but money and all that benefits man by virtue. Such is my doctrine, and if it is this which corrupts the youth of the city, then I am indeed a source of corruption. But if anybody says this is not my doctrine, then he is telling an untruth. Therefore, O men of Athens, do as Anytus bids you or refuse to do as he bids; condemn me or acquit me, but whichever you do, be sure I shall never alter my ways, not even if I have to die many times."

No doubt there was an uproar among the dicasts at these valiant words, which must have determined the issue against him. He goes on to liken himself to a heaven-sent gadfly, which stirs up the great and noble steed of state who is slow in his movements owing to his very size. If, however, he had engaged in politics—here is another shrewd hit at his political enemies—he would have perished long ago. "Do not be offended at my telling you the truth," he adds, "for the truth is, that no

man who goes to war with you or any other multitude, honestly striving against the many lawless and unrighteous deeds which are done in a state, will save his life. He who would fight for the right, should he desire even a brief life, must have a private, not a public, position." He clinches this argument by telling the dicasts how he had twice risked his life by personally refusing to countenance illegal action on the part of the government—first, under the democracy at the trial of the generals after the Battle of Arginusæ, and again when the Thirty Tyrants were in power. And, returning to the charge that he corrupted young men, he points out a number of persons in court who can give evidence bearing on it. These are personally acquainted with his teaching and ready to support him with their testimony. And for no other reason save for the sake of justice, because they know he is telling the truth, and Meletus is a liar. Finally, though a creature of flesh and blood, and not "of wood or stone" in Homer's phrase, with a family of three sons, he has no intention of producing them in court as a moving spectacle to tempt his judges to perjure themselves. The court should be more disposed to condemn the

defendant who gets up a doleful scene and makes the city ridiculous than one who holds his peace. And so he commits his cause to God and his countrymen, to be determined as is best for them and him.

The verdict is "Guilty," but the adverse vote does not involve the ratification of the death penalty. According to Athenian law, the defendant is allowed to propose an alternative, which the judges can accept, if they so choose. Socrates says he expected the vote of condemnation, but is surprised at the smallness of the majority. If thirty votes had been cast on the other side, he would have been acquitted. He thinks he has at any rate escaped Meletus—for it is clear that, without the help of Anytus and Lycus, he would not have got one-fifth of the votes, and so would have incurred a fine of a thousand drachmae.

With grim and gallant humour, Socrates suggests that the proper alternative penalty is maintenance at the state's expense—the perpetual right of dining in the Prytaneum, or public hall. A poverty-stricken benefactor of the city such as he is has a better right to such a reward than the well-to-do citizen who has won the prize at Olympia in the horse or chariot race,

whether the chariot be drawn by two horses or by many.

He will not admit that he deserves any punishment. Imprisonment by itself, or till a fine be paid, is out of the question. Exile would be intolerable at his age, for it would involve wandering from city to city. For it is certain that wherever he went, the young men would flock to him ; and if he were to drive them away, they would ask their elders to drive him out ; and if he let them come, their fathers and friends would get rid of him. A fine, then, is the only possible alternative. He himself could only scrape together a mina. But his friends, Plato, Crito, Critobulus, and Apollodorus, bid him assess the fine at thirty minae, for which they will stand security.

The suggested alternative is refused, and Socrates stands condemned to death. He again rises to speak with the weighty and prophetic words of one whose name has been struck out of the list of men with a life to live. Neither in war nor at law should a man be taught to use any and every means of escaping death. The difficulty is not to evade death, but avoid unrighteousness, for that runs faster than death. He is old and moves slowly, and



death, the slower runner of the two, has overtaken him. His accusers are keen and swift, but they have been overtaken by the swifter runner, which is unrighteousness. He will abide by his lot ; let them abide by theirs.

In the hour of death men are gifted with prophetic power, and he has a prophecy for those unjust judges who have condemned him. They will not escape censure by murdering their censor. For other and younger and less considerate accusers, whom he has hitherto restrained, will take his place, and they will be more mightily reproved.

For those who voted for acquittal, he has a message of good hope. In nothing he has done or said during his trial has the divine monitor within checked him at all. And this silence is an intimation that what has happened to him is a boon, not a bane ; so that those who think death is an evil are in error. Looking at it in another way, there is great reason to believe that death is a good. If it be a dreamless sleep, such as even the Great King does not often enjoy, then all eternity is but one restful night. But, if death be the journey to another place, where all the great dead abide, it is a pilgrimage well worth the

pilgrim's while. What would not a man give if he might talk with Orpheus and Musæus and Hesiod and Homer? He himself will have a wonderful interest in meeting and conversing with Palamedes, and Ajax, the son of Telamon, and any other ancient hero who has suffered death through an unjust judgment; there will be no small pleasure in comparing his sufferings with theirs. Above all, he will then be able to continue his inquiry into true and false knowledge. What would a man not give to be able to examine the leader of the great Trojan Expedition; or Odysseus or Sisyphus, or numberless others, women as well as men! What infinite delight there would be in talking with them, and asking them questions! In another world they do not put a man to death for asking questions; certainly not.

Let my just judges be of good cheer and know of a certainty that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death. He and his are not forgotten by the gods; nor has the approaching death of Socrates befallen through blind chance. It is clear that the time had come for him to die and be released from trouble; that was why the oracle gave no sign. For that reason, also, he is not angry with those who

condemned or those who accused him; they have done him no harm, though they did not mean to do him any good—for which he may gently chide them!

Still he has a favour to ask of them. When his sons grow up, let them be punished and troubled, as their father has troubled others, if they care more about riches or anything else than virtue, or pretend to be something when they are really nothing.

“The hour of departure has arrived,” says the doomed man in conclusion, “and we go our ways—I to die, you to live. Which is better, only God knows.”

This was one of the undying days in the world's history. The oftener I read Plato's *Apology* and the older I grow, the stronger is my conviction that we hear in it Socrates speaking from his pillory-platform, and that the chronicler has had to leave all else to the reader's imagination.

## I

THERE was an Athenian legend that Minos, the ruler of Crete, had taken vengeance on Athens for the slaying of his son Androgeos by exacting an annual tribute of seven youths and seven maidens, as a sacrifice to the Cretan monster known as the Minotaur. On the third occasion of paying this penal tribute, it happened that one of the seven youths was the hero Theseus ; and he, with the help of Apollo, slew the monster lurking in his labyrinth and so relieved his countrymen from the dreadful necessity imposed on them. In gratitude to the god, "Delos' own Apollo," the hero made a vow that, if he succeeded in his task of redemption and rescue, the vessel in which he and his fellow-victims were sailing to Crete should be sent every year to take part in the great Feast of Apollo at Delos.

The recent excavations at Knossos have shown that there is more than a single grain of truth in this strange legend

Crete was in prehistoric times the seat of a great sea empire, and its ruler, whose throne was established at Knossos, was styled the Minos, just as Egypt's overlord was known as the Pharaoh. In the last and most splendid epoch of this rich and prosperous state a new and wonderful palace, extending over five acres and several storeys in height, was built at Knossos, and its maze of chambers and corridors and storage-rooms and stairways gave rise to the famous legend of the Cretan labyrinth. The myth of the Minotaur, half man and half bull, which devoured young men and maidens in its dark recesses, is also seen to be rooted in reality. From the pictures which adorn the palace chambers it is clear that bull-fighting, in which both sexes engaged, was a favourite spectacle with the wasp-waisted Cretan plutocrats, perhaps even part of a barbarous ritual; and it is possible, even probable, that overseas dependencies were compelled to provide a fixed number of victims every year. Furthermore, about 1400 B.C. the Cretan sea-power was destroyed probably by a concerted attack from the mainland, just as the "stone highwayman" known as Troy was in a later period, and the heroic

Theseus may have been the leader of the victorious invasion.

Ever since the hero's triumphant return to Athens (so the legend averred) his vow had been faithfully fulfilled. Moreover, as was also ordained, in the time between the sacred vessel's departure and return Athens had always been kept free from pollution and no man put to death within her walls. In 399 B.C. the ship set sail on the day before Socrates' trial and did not return from its mission for a whole month, during which period Socrates was kept in prison. At Athens the gaol regulations were on the whole humane, and the condemned prisoner was allowed to see his friends every day. Had he chosen to do so, he could easily have escaped with the help of his friends and taken refuge in Thessaly. Probably the authorities would have connived at such a course so as to save the city from the reproaches of posterity for his execution which were already beginning to be foreseen.

Crito, the oldest and most honoured of Socrates' friends and pupils, was deputed to persuade the prisoner to escape, and in the dialogue that bears his name Plato describes the interview and the discussion which ensued. The sacred ship had

already been sighted off Sunium, and there was not a moment to be lost. Crito arrived at the prison when dawn was breaking, and was promptly admitted by the head gaoler, to whom he had once done a kindness. For a while, the anxious envoy refrained from awakening the doomed man, sitting in silence and watching his unperturbed slumbers with amazement and a certain envy. Had he been at once aroused Socrates would have missed the conclusion of the prophetic dream in which there had appeared to him the likeness of a woman, fair and comely, dressed in bright raiment, who called to him and said: "*O Socrates, the third day hence to fertile Phthia thou shalt go.*"<sup>1</sup> Crito brings all the obvious arguments to bear when he explains the nature of his mission. "There are persons," he says, "who are willing to get you out of prison at no great cost; and as for the informers they are far from being exorbitant in their demands—a little money will satisfy them." State-paid detectives were undreamed of at Athens, and their place in a modern community was taken by "sycophants" or private spies who would hold their tongues for a consideration.

<sup>1</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, IX, 365.

We can guess how Socrates must have disliked the idea of bribing such odious parasites in order to ensure his escape. Crito goes on to say that his own ample means are at Socrates' service and that many others, including strangers such as Simmias from Thebes, would be only too willing to spend their money in helping him. Furthermore, he need not be afraid, as he said in court, of not knowing what to do with himself if he left Athens. Wherever he went he would find men willing to love him and learn from him, and if he made Thessaly his home, he could stay with friends of Crito there who would value and protect him. Let him consider the future of his children who might incur the usual sad fate of orphans, if he deserted them by choosing the less manly part and letting his enemies destroy him.

And so on and so forth—the worldly view of the case is cleverly enforced. The discussion that follows may be imaginary, but all that Socrates says is “in character” and a noble vindication of his good citizenship. He is exhibited in this matchless piece of dramatised dialectic, not as the philosopher who is fulfilling a divine mission and trusts in the will of heaven,



but as the good citizen who, though unjustly condemned, is willing to obey the laws of his country at the cost of his life. The net of sophistries woven by Crito to snare his soul is easily broken, and the charge of bad citizenship brought by his adversaries, and so often repeated by critical commentators in later ages, is finely confuted.

The concluding passage in which the Laws of Athens are personified and come to remonstrate with him, supposing he consented to take refuge in Thebes or Thessaly, admirably illustrate Plato's aptitude (doubtlessly acquired from his master) for translating an abstruse argument into picturesque imagery. The Laws begin by pointing out that he was brought into the world and educated by their help, and that he of all men, who had lived in Athens for seventy years more constantly than any other citizen, was bound to honour the implied covenant of obedience. How could he run away and forsake his agreements without dishonour to himself and danger to his friends? How go back on his declaration at the trial that he preferred death to exile? If he fled to a well-governed state such as Thebes or Megara, the local Laws would consider him

an enemy. On the other hand, if he went to Crito's friends in Thessaly, where there was great disorder and licence, they would be delighted to hear the story of his escape from prison, set off with absurd particulars of the way in which he was wrapped in a goatskin or some other disguise, strangely transformed as the manner is of runaways. But would there be no one to remind him that in his old age he was not ashamed to violate the most sacred laws from a wretched desire to live a little longer. "Perhaps not," say the Laws, "if you keep them in a good humour; but if they happen to be ill-tempered, you will hear many degrading things; you will live, but how?—as the flatterer of all men and the servitor of all men; and doing what?—eating and drinking in Thessaly, having gone abroad to get a dinner!" And what, then, would have become of all his fine sentiments about justice and virtue? If he took his children with him to Thessaly, he would be robbing them of Athenian citizenship—was that the benefit he intended to confer on them? If, on the other hand, he left them in Athens, did he really believe that his friends would take better care of them because he was in Thessaly and not in the other world?

The Laws conclude their argument with this solemn appeal to the just man's sense of justice as a divine thing :

" Listen, then, Socrates, to us who have brought you up. Think not of life and children first, and of justice afterwards, but of justice first, that you may be justified before the princes of the world below. For neither will you nor any that belong to you be happier or holier or juster in this life, or happier in another, if you do as Crito bids. Now you depart in innocence, a sufferer and not a doer of evil ; a victim, not of the laws, but of men. But if you go forth, returning evil for evil, and injury for injury, breaking the covenants and agreements which you have made with us, and wronging those whom you ought least of all to wrong, that is to say, yourself, your friends, your country, and us, we shall be angry with you while you live, and our brethren, the laws in the world below, will receive you as an enemy ; for they will know that you have done your best to destroy us. Listen, then, to us and not to Crito."

Such are the words of the Voice, Socrates avers, which is murmuring in his ears like the music of flutes overheard by a celebrant of the Mysteries and preventing him from hearing anything else. His mind is made up ; further argument will be futile. Yet, if Crito has anything to add, he will hear him. Crito, shamed into silence, has nothing more to say.

“Leave me then,” says Socrates, “to obey the will of God and follow whither he leads.”

It has been suggested that the whole of this interview is Plato's invention; in the choice of Socrates' aged friend to propose flight the hand of the artist has been suspected. To me it all seems based on an incident which admittedly occurred and, since the power of remembrance in days when even manuscripts were few was far greater than it is to-day, on actual sayings of Socrates. Under the shadow of approaching death the character of Socrates, as has happened with lesser men, gathers strength at the inner spring of divine inspiration, and that we are able to say of him :

“He nothing common did or mean  
Upon that memorable scene ”

immeasurably strengthens the appeal of a doctrine expressed in works as well as words. Casuists, after their fashion, have played with the suggestion that Socrates should have chosen to escape and live, preferring the good which he might still have been able to perform to a noble death. Shelley, a Platonist in the spirit,

thought Socrates "did well to die," though not for the "sophistical" reasons given in Plato's dialogue. Not "the world," however, but the "one wise man" was the paradoxical principle which Socrates took as his guide, and he had to obey reason, even if its conclusions were fatal to him. He lived up to his principle and he died up to it, so to speak. Had it been otherwise, he would have merely been one among the many half-saints of Greco-Roman civilisation. His undying death made him a spiritual leader of mankind till the end of time.

## II

The *Phædo*, in which the last hours of Socrates are described with a divine simplicity, is the most poignant and appealing document bequeathed to us by classic antiquity. You feel as you read it in the original Greek (to which no translation into a modern language can do full justice) that the only possible appreciation of its utter truthfulness is the wise saying of a child: "It is so beautiful, it must be true." If beauty be indeed the shadow of truth,

then its historical validity needs no further vindication.

It is only on second thoughts that the reader is compelled, much against his will, to entertain doubts as to its authenticity as the record of things actually said and done and endured. Life itself, as we perplexed moderns see it, is never an artist; least of all a dramatic artist. So, our imagination being daunted, we may for a moment be persuaded to regard the *Phædo* as from first to last a masterpiece of art. Like the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides it is cast in the form of a Greek tragedy. Socrates is the protagonist and Simmias and Cebes the secondary personages. None of Plato's dramatic discussions has a more convincing unity of subject, action, and feeling. Plato has certainly fulfilled that wise condition of Greek art, that a veil of beauty should be cast over all scenes of suffering and death. Every episode is so arranged as to arise naturally out of the situation, to lead up to the next, and to be a note in the crescendo of human interest. The gathering of Socrates' friends at the prison early on the morning of his last day, the arrival and dismissal of the distraught Xanthippe whose presence at a philo-

sophic inquiry would have been out of place, the dejection of the hearers at the temporary overthrow of the argument for immortality, the sight of Socrates playing with the young Phædo's locks, the grateful words of the gaoler and his sudden tears, the final scenes in which Socrates alone remains unperturbed—all these episodes are presented in the spirit of "Nothing Too Much," with a delicate and reticent artistry which is beyond all praise. If it had all been written in verse for theatrical representation, then, as Jowett suggests, a final chorus of exultant numbers and eloquent gestures would have enforced the "moral" of the drama: "Nothing evil can happen to a good man in life and death." There is nothing in ancient or modern tragedies, nothing in poetry, nothing in history (with one exception) which grips the heart and unseals the source of tears as does this story of the last hours of Socrates. He could not have had a more fitting occupation at such a time than a discourse on immortality, nor his disciples a more consoling pre-occupation. So the picture of the good man's passing is lifted out of time into eternity. "How far the words attributed to Socrates were actually uttered by him,"

says Jowett, whom I prefer as a guide in such large issues to the modern commentators who are his pupils, but may be more accurate in minute details, "we forbear to ask; for no answer can be given to this question. And it is better to resign ourselves to the feeling of a great work than to linger among critical uncertainties." My own belief is that even if the immortal arguments for faith in immortality represent the ideas of Socrates as seen through the magnifying temperament of Plato, yet all that is set forth as plain fact in the narration is as sound history as the details of Christ's life and trial and death in the four Gospels. I believe that Socrates' friends did assemble, as named, at the prison on that last morning; that the day was devoted to a discussion on immortality; that everything befell from the taking-off of Socrates' chains to the closing of his eyes in death by Crito, exactly as we are told. Plato may have interpreted his own philosophic inventions in this Dialogue, but he could not have invented the Socrates of these last immortal moments, any more than St. Luke could have invented the Jesus Christ of his Gospel.

It is the last meeting of the Socratic



circle : the last of innumerable gatherings, extending over forty years or more, for social intercourse combined with philosophic inquiry. It is a symposium at which Death is host and hemlock the only wine. Phædo, the "beloved disciple," is the narrator, and he tells his story to Eche crates some months or even years after the master's execution, at Phlius, a town in the Peloponnesus. He gives a complete list of those who went to the prison on the last morning, and tells us how there was a strange admixture of pain in the pleasure usually felt at hearing Socrates discoursing on philosophy : "We were laughing and weeping by turns, especially the excitable Apollodorus—you know the sort of man." Of native Athenians there were, besides Apollodorus, Critobulus and his father Crito, Hermogenes, Epigenes, Æschines, and Antisthenes ; also Ctesippus of the parish of Pæania, Menexenus and some others ; Plato was too ill to be there. Aristippus and Cleombrotus were absent in Ægina. Among the strangers present were Simmias and Cebes, two disciples of Philolaus whom Socrates "by his enchantments had attracted from Thebes," and who, in the discussion, state the doubts natural to the popular mind and

their own difficulties with candour and a complete lack of controversial bitterness. Socrates needs none of the weapons he had been accustomed to use against disputants who were prejudiced against him from the outset. Phædo describes their reception at the prison :

“ On our arrival the jailer who answered the door, instead of admitting us, came out and told us to stay until he called us. ‘ For the Eleven,’ he said, ‘ are now with Socrates ; they are taking off his chains, and giving orders that he is to die to-day.’ He soon returned and said that we might come in. On entering we found Socrates just released from chains, and Xanthippe, whom you know, sitting by him, and holding his child in her arms. When she saw us she uttered a cry and said, as women will : ‘ O Socrates, this is the last time that either you will converse with your friends, or they with you.’ Socrates turned to Crito and said : ‘ Crito, let some one take her home.’ Some of Crito’s people accordingly led her away, crying out and beating herself. And when she was gone Socrates, sitting upon the couch, bent and rubbed his leg, saying, as he was rubbing : ‘ How singular is the thing called pleasure, and how curiously related to pain, which might be thought to be the opposite of it; for they are never present to a man at the same instant, and yet he who pursues either is generally compelled to take the other ; their bodies are two, but they are joined by a single head. And I cannot help thinking that if Æsop had remembered them, he would have made a fable about God trying to reconcile their strife, and how, when he could not,

he fastened their heads together; and this is the reason why when one comes the other follows: as I know by my own experience now, when after the pain in my leg which was caused by the chain pleasure appears to succeed''

It is not long before the immortal discussion is started by Cebes, who speaks in his native Bœotian ("Fery true," he says with a sort of burr) and pleases Socrates with his earnest desire to get at the truth. "Here is a man," says the Master, "who is always inquiring and is not so easily convinced by the first thing he hears." He was challenged by the two Thebans, who are certainly free from the dulness popularly imparted to Bœotians, to justify his readiness to die and forsake his friends and the gods of this life.

Socrates had said to the dicasts at his trial: "You go hence to life and I to death—but which is the better lot, God knows" He now goes a step further and tries to prove that death is better than life, because it is the separation of the soul from the body; and only when so released can the soul attain true knowledge. The proof that the soul has a life apart from the body is based on the law of opposites and the doctrine of reminiscence. In the

first place, opposites alternate and are generated out of each other—*e.g.* less, greater ; weaker, stronger ; sleeping, waking ; life, death ; death, life. Secondly, the doctrine of reminiscence, which finds expression in such inevitable reflections as Wordsworth's

“ Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory, do we come  
From God who is our home.”

is adduced to demonstrate the soul's pre-existence. Taken together, these arguments confirm Socrates' conviction that man's soul is immortal, since it exists before his birth and survives his death. Yet one of those popular beliefs which are so often stronger than a truth established by reasoning has still to be disposed of. “ This is a cauld and eerie nicht for me to be fleeing through the air,” said the old Scots lady on her death-bed in Dean Ramsay's story, illustrating the vulgar idea which survives even among Christians that the released soul is such a weak and timorous thing that it might vanish into thin air, especially if there was a wind blowing. To a fifth-century Greek, brought up on Homer and recalling his notion of gibbering ghosts flitting away

to Hades such notions were much more real and terrifying than they are to us. Socrates, accordingly, shows that the soul is strong, more durable than the body; the less she partakes of the bodily nature, the greater her strength. The body may be preserved for ages by the embalmer's art; how unlikely, then, that the soul will perish and be dissipated into air on her way to the good and wise God. If she has been polluted and engrossed by the bodily appetites, she may be weak and timorous at first. Indeed for fear of the world below, she may linger about the sepulchre, loath to leave her old companion, as a ghostly apparition, still saturated with the sensual and so visible to the sense of sight, the corporeal eye. A soul thus infected by the flesh may enter into some animal whose nature is congenial to her former life of lust or violence, such as an ass, a wolf, a kite. But souls that have been virtuous, though without philosophy, may pass into gentle and social creatures, such as bees or ants. Only the lover of wisdom, however, who departs in purity, can hope to enter the company of the gods. He has been drawn out of the "miry clay" by philosophy and freed from the mists of passion and illusions of

sense, and as a prisoner released from his prison-house, a disembodied thing, is sane and secure and able to bear the light of truth.

Simmias and Cebes still have their doubts, but are unwilling to raise objections at such a time. At the bottom of their Bœotian minds (though we are not told so) there is lurking the stupid notion (though they guess it not) that it would be wrong to "unsettle" their friend's mind when he was already a dying man. Socrates rebukes them for their reluctance, likening himself to the swan which has sung the praises of Apollo all his life long and, in joy, not sorrow, sings them more lustily than ever at his death. Simmias confesses that there would be cowardice in stopping short of an exhaustive examination. He and his Theban friend state their objections. Simmias thinks that the soul is a harmony, having the same relation to the body as its music has to a lyre which it cannot survive. Cebes contends that, while the soul has been shown to have a longer life than the body, her immortality has not yet been proved—for, having worn out many bodies, her last body may survive her just as an old weaver may leave his last coat behind him

after his death, though a man is more lasting than a coat.

The audience is deeply perturbed by these objections, which seem to leave everything in confusion and uncertainty. Their faith is shaken. But Socrates is as cool as a general who rallies his broken forces and in the end wins a victory. While considering his reply, he plays with Phædo's hair saying: "To-morrow, Phædo, I suppose that these fair locks of yours will be severed." "Yes, Socrates, I suppose they will" says the boy. "Not if you take my advice." "What shall I do with them?" "To-day and to-morrow," replies Socrates, "if this argument dies and we cannot bring it to life again, you and I will both shave off our hair." It is a characteristic piece of Socratic humour.

Of course, he confutes the Theban thinkers to their own satisfaction and that of the silent listeners. The soul cannot be a harmony, for a harmony is an effect, the soul a cause; a harmony follows, the soul leads; a harmony has degrees, the soul no degrees at all. Moreover, the soul cannot be a harmony in relation to the body, since it often resists the bodily affections, as Homer shows us Odysseus

“rebuking his heart.” So the goddess Harmonia, as Socrates humorously describes the argument of Simmias, is happily dismissed. Cebes’ objection is also disposed of in an argument, based on Socrates’ experience in considering the question of natural growth or causation, which cannot be summarised. It is based on the Platonic doctrine of ideas, which was accepted as sheer common sense by the Socratic circle. So, having brought the discussion to a happy conclusion and renewed the faith of his audience, Socrates finishes with one of the three great “Myths,” which describes the fortunes of good men and bad after death. He is not very confident that the description he gives of the soul and her many mansions is exactly true. But, if a man has adorned her in her own proper jewels, temperance and justice and courage and nobility and truth, he may be sure she will fare well in her journey to the world below. Let us be diligent in living a life of goodness and wisdom; fair is the prize and high the hope.

“Now the hour of sunset was near, for a good deal of time had passed while he was within. When he came out, he sat down with us again after his bath, but not much was said. Soon the jailer, who



was the servant of the Eleven, entered and stood by him, saying : To you, Socrates, whom I know to be the noblest and gentlest and best of all who ever came to this place, I will not impute the angry feelings of other men, who rage and swear at me, when, in obedience to the authorities, I bid them drink the poison—indeed, I am sure that you will not be angry with me, for others, as you are aware, and not I, are to blame. And so fare you well, and try to bear lightly what must needs be—you know my errand. Then, bursting into tears, he turned away and went out.

“ Socrates looked at him and said . I return your good wishes, and will do as you bid. Then, turning to us, he said. How charming the man is, since I have been in prison he has always been coming to see me, and at times he would talk to me, and was as good to me as could be, and now see how generously he sorrows on my account. We must do as he says, Crito, and therefore let the cup be brought, if the poison is prepared : if not, let the attendant prepare some.

“ Yet, said Crito, the sun is still upon the hill-tops, and I know that many a one has taken the draught late, and after the announcement has been made to him, he has eaten and drunk, and enjoyed the society of his beloved, do not hurry—there is time enough.

“ Socrates said. Yes, Crito, and they of whom you speak are right in so acting, for they think that they will be gainers by the delay ; but I am right in not following their example, for I do not think that I should gain anything by drinking the poison a little later ; I should only be ridiculous in my own eyes for sparing and saving a life which is already forfeit. Please, then, to do as I say, and not to refuse me

“Crito made a sign to the servant, who was standing by; and he went out, and having been absent for some time, returned with the jailer carrying the cup of poison. Socrates said: You, my good friend, who are experienced in these matters, shall give me directions how I am to proceed. The man answered: You have only to walk about until your legs are heavy, and then to lie down, and the poison will act. At the same time he handed the cup to Socrates, who in the easiest and gentlest manner, without the least fear or change of colour or feature, looking at the man with all his eyes, Echecrates, as his manner was, took the cup and said: What do you say about making a libation out of this cup to any god? May I, or not? The man answered: We only prepare, Socrates, just so much as we deem enough. I understand, he said, but I may and must ask the gods to prosper my journey from this to the other world—even so—and so be it according to my prayer. Then, raising the cup to his lips, quite readily and cheerfully he drank off the poison. And hitherto most of us had been able to control our sorrow; but now when we saw him drinking, and saw, too, that he had finished the draught, we could no longer forbear, and in spite of myself my own tears were flowing fast; so that I covered my face and wept, not for him, but at the thought of my own calamity in having to part from such a friend. Nor was I the first; for Crito, when he found himself unable to restrain his tears, had got up, and I followed; and at the moment, Apollodorus, who had been weeping all the time, broke out in a loud and passionate cry which made cowards of us all. Socrates alone retained his calmness: What is this strange outcry? he said. I sent away the women mainly in order that they might

not misbehave in this way, for I have been told that a man should die in peace. Be quiet then, and have patience. When we heard his words we were ashamed, and refrained our tears; and he walked about until, as he said, his legs began to fail, and then he lay on his back according to the directions, and the man who gave him the poison now and then looked at his feet and legs; and after a while he pressed his foot hard, and asked him if he could feel, and he said No, and then his leg, and so upwards and upwards, and showed us that he was cold and stiff. And he felt them himself, and said: When the poison reaches the heart, that will be the end. He was beginning to grow cold about the groin, when he uncovered his face, for he had covered himself up, and said—they were his last words—he said: Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius, will you remember to pay the debt? The debt shall be paid, said Crito; is there anything else? There was no answer to this question; but in a minute or two a movement was heard, and the attendants uncovered him, his eyes were set, and Crito closed his eyes and mouth.

“Such was the end, Echecrates, of our friend; concerning whom I may truly say that of all the men of his time whom I have known, he was the wisest and justest and best.”

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## *Epilogue*

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THE life of Socrates spanned the whole period of Athenian greatness. At his birth Athens was still the city which had defied and defeated the Great King, whose throne had been set for a single day on Attic soil that he might watch the triumph of his great Armada at Salamis. It was still the city which cherished the significant tradition that Æschylus had helped in the winning of that decisive battle, that Sophocles had danced among the choir-boys who celebrated it, that Euripides was born in the self-same year of undying glory. At his death the proud, Imperial Athens, throned in the Ægean and meditating the control of the whole Mediterranean, had vanished for ever: leaving a prosperous commercial city, the great distributing centre of Greece, in which the specialist soon became predominant. Socrates, whom we see against a background of sociable street-corners, would have been impossible in Fourth-century Athens—if only because he could never have found a circle of friends and acquaintances, who would be prepared to discuss any question in

any place at any time. The Fifth-century Athenians—like our typical Elizabethans—could turn their hands to any task they chose or that chose them. The “fair and good” citizen of the Periclean Age, as Pericles said, was proud of his versatility. He could fight in heavy armour, wrestle and run and jump, play the lyre, sing a song to his own accompaniment, dance in a chorus, criticise a tragedy, and make a suitable speech in a law court or in the assembly which settled the policy of Athens in great or small matters. His insatiable curiosity, moreover, made him an eager inquirer and disputant. But Fourth-century Athens was a city of professional soldiers, professional lawyers, professional financiers, professional artists—and professional philosophers! In an era of specialisation, when money-making was the chief pursuit and “talking shop” the favourite form of conversation, Socrates could never have become a social personage.

It was perhaps as well that he perished with the wonder-city whose joys and sorrows had been so great a part of his life—a far greater part, I feel sure, than can be gathered from what we are told of his works and days by Xenophon and Plato.

Ingenious attempts have been made to show that he thought it the just man's duty to forgive, not only his private enemies, but also the enemies of his city. It is impossible to maintain such a thesis when we find him telling Critobulus (as is recorded in the *Memorabilia*) that "a man's virtue is to excel his friends in kindness and his foes in hostility." It may well be that he did not hate the enemies of Athens with the unreasoning rancour of the Athenian mob. He certainly seems to have shared in the strange veneration felt by all the Greeks for the virile self-restraint, physical perfection, and intense patriotism of the Spartans, of whose institutions Plato was such a sympathetic student. When the 300 ragged and starving Spartan soldiers (120 of them full citizens) captured in Sphacteria (425 B.C.) by Cleon and Demosthenes were marched through the streets of Athens, I cannot imagine Socrates joining in the jeers and curses of the jubilant mob. Yes, it is highly probable that the patriotism of Socrates could have been summed up in the saying: "May my country always be in the right—but my country, right or wrong!" He was an Athenian of the Athenians, who loved his city as a mother

and a mistress and a queen, with a devotion not unlike that felt for the celestial virago whose name is still a blazing star in English remembrance. He thought exile would be unendurable, even though he were to find friends and disciples in other centres of Greek civilisation. Except when on military service, he seems to have left Athens on one occasion only, when he went to see the Isthmian Games. His devotion to Athens recalls the words of Johnson about his own beloved metropolis: "Why, sir, you will find no man at all intellectual, who is willing to leave London. No, sir, when a man is tired of London he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford." He must have been stricken to the heart when the greater catastrophes of the Peloponnesian War plunged the city into mourning. News travelled but slowly in the ancient world, and it was left to a stranger landing at Peiræus and sitting down to be shaved in a barber's shop to bring the first tidings of the annihilation of the Sicilian Expeditionary Force. The stranger was thrown into prison for spreading lying rumours, and it was not until others arrived to corroborate his story that the ghastly truth was accepted. Socrates and all the other Athenians must

then have echoed that "one universal groan of intolerable anguish" which was raised, as Thucydides relates, by the spectators of the last lost sea-fight in the harbour of Syracuse. Even more terrible was the announcement of the final disaster at Ægospotami, when the noise of frenzied lamentations travelled up the long walls to the helpless and hopeless city. "That night," says Xenophon, "nobody slept; and it was not so much of their dead that the citizens were thinking as of all they had done to the people of Melos and many other Greeks—and how they must now endure the same hard fate themselves." Socrates must have felt the same heart-piercing pang as the least stoical of his fellow-citizens, and in the months of starvation and despair that followed, he may have found a sad consolation in the last words of the god-fearing Nicias: "Others, having done what men could, have endured what men must."

We know exactly what he thought of all the practitioners of *real politik* who had brought so many disasters on his beloved city. "You praise the men who fooled the citizens and satisfied their desires," he says in the *Gorgias* to Callicles, a type of the so-called "practical man" who has



no moral sense and scorns all wisdom that does not make for worldly advancement, "and people say they have made the city great, not seeing that the swollen and ulcerated condition of the state is to be attributed to these elder statesmen; for they have filled the city full of harbours and docks and walls and revenues and all that, and have left no room for justice and temperance. And when the crisis of the disorder comes, the people will blame the advisers of the hour, but applaud Themistocles and Cimon and Pericles, who are the real authors of their calamities." He boasts that he himself is the only true statesman Athens has ever had; for he alone would have made the city just and good and temperate, basing its policy on the love of true wisdom. There is an easily excused inconsistency in his theory of the higher politics which could only be carried into practice when "philosophers are kings." He has a contemptuous pity for the mob, knowing it to be less intelligent than any of its units, and he rejects the claims of any type of so-called statesman—a Cimon or a Cleon, a Pericles or a Cleophon—to the gratitude of their own or later generations. Yet he thinks of his city as beautiful, mighty, generous and

wise, and endowed with laws which every just man must obey. Athens was one of his eternal verities, and he would find full confirmation of his belief in the fact of her two-fold survival to-day.

Too many of the modern commentators on the character of Socrates have forgotten that he was the creature of his country and his century. He was a saint—but not a Christian saint. Like all the Greek thinkers of his time and clime, he believed that man's happiness consisted in the full and harmonious development of all his powers and faculties, especially of reason which could alone bring them into harmony with one another. Justice, not love, was to him the key-virtue of all the human qualities, which make for the welfare of a community. The Christian ideal of an indiscriminating and universal love which discards every form of self-interest in the service of God and Man would have been beyond his comprehension. The contrast of our eleventh commandment, "Love one another," with the fierce animosities of those who proposed to accept it as a ruling ideal, would surely have compelled him to regard Christians of every militant creed as children of unreason, and barbarians at that. Religious wars, such as

the crusade against the Albigenses and the terrible struggles (ancient historians would have called them "truceless" wars) which followed the revolt against Rome's spiritual tyranny were unknown to the Greek world. They would have been unthinkable to a Fifth-century Athenian, who would surely have explained them as among the incalculable consequences of barbarian mentality.

It would be almost as difficult for Socrates to grasp that conception of an opposition between body and soul which, in some shape or form, is a factor in the life of every professing Christian. His asceticism was unduly stressed by some of his admirers who, when he was ashes, adopted him as the father of Cynicism. It is surely an instance of the irony of circumstances that there should be any philosophic connection between the convivial Socrates of the *Symposia* and that denizen of a wine-jar who asked only one favour of Alexander the Great, that he should stand out of his sunlight. His scorn of comfort, and conspicuous temperance, were little more than a Spartan form of the physical self-control required to preserve a healthy mind in a healthy body. Unbeautiful himself, he admired more than the

average Greek that harmoniously-developed physique of rounded and fluent muscles, without a vestige of the angularity of the finest modern athletes, which was the greatest masterpiece of Greek art, being the reward of centuries of open-air living, frugal diet, and athletic exercises. Moreover, he saw in the physical beauty of a Lysis or a Charmides the outward and visible sign of a spirit capable of beautiful activities. While shaking his head over the philosophy of Rousseau, he would have agreed with the dictum of that expert in public virtues and private vices that "all sensual passions find their home in effeminate bodies." He would surely have felt the joyous charm of St. Francis of Assisi, but of all his poetic sayings would only have understood the word of praise for "brother ass," his much-burdened body. But the life of St. Simeon Stylites or any other systematic torturer of the flesh would have filled him with horror and brought to his lips the final word of condemnation—barbarian!

Yet by a different road and with a different intention, Socrates attained that "otherworldliness" which is a characteristic of the Christian saints and martyrs. He despised and defied the judgments of the

world around him. Speaking again to Callicles, he says : " My aim is to make my soul as free from blemish as may be against the day when the Judge shall see it. I am minded, then, to care nothing for what the world calls honour, but to regard truth alone; and so to live and die when death comes with what real goodness I can." But the individual's preoccupation with the saving of his own soul alone, which jars on us even in the enraptured writings of Thomas à Kempis, was a form of egoism avoided by Socrates. He had a divine mission, as he believed, to destroy all the hypocrisies, conscious or unconscious, in which the human soul is so involved that it cannot even see, much less follow, the way of truth. Above all he desired, at Apollo's behest, to expose that deadliest illusion of all which men call success. When crimes on the grand scale are committed and the criminal lives and dies in prosperity, amid universal applause, men are disposed to condone them as being a part of history, and more often than not productive of good as well as evil. But Socrates would have us pass the same sentence of condemnation on the criminal who succeeds as on him who fails: insisting, furthermore, that the

former is more miserable than the latter in that he escapes punishment in this world. He would have ruthlessly confuted all the modern sophisms (such as "To know all is to forgive all") which excuse the agreeable exercise of our compassion in extreme cases. Nowhere in classical literature is clearer expression given than in the *Gorgias* (over which the imminent martyrdom of its protagonist hangs like a cloud) to the theory of purification by suffering in this world—that tremendous idea which kindled the fires of the Inquisition and enabled its victims to endure them with a high courage. When Socrates laid it down as eternal law that it is a greater evil to commit injustice than to suffer it, meaning that the only real evil is moral evil, he was anticipating the words of the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake."

By abandoning the futile speculations of the earliest Greek thinkers as to the origin and nature of the cosmos and inquiring into the springs of human conduct, Socrates set Greek philosophy on a firm foundation for further development. For that reason and also because he was convinced that the human mind, God's

greatest gift to man, was capable of comprehending the most profound mysteries, he is one of the unseen Caryatides, so to speak, whose powerful shoulders support the wondrous fabric of Christian theology, the master-science of the Middle Ages. Dean Inge, whose bleak intelligence has exposed the absurdity of so many comfortable fallacies of to-day, was not uttering a paradox when he said there is very little connection between Palestine and Christian dogma. Without the use of the colloquial Greek, which was known to men of every race and class in the eastern half of the Mediterranean world, the story of Christ's life and teaching could never have spread as rapidly as it did in the first two centuries of the Christian era. And but for the Greek philosophy that derives from the "unconquerable mind" of Socrates through Plato and the Neo-Platonists, a theology which the thoughtful man could accept could never have come into being. As long as Christ was personally remembered, and it was possible to hope for His immediate return, there was no need of philosophy as the handmaid of faith. But with the swift fading away of memories and hopes and the world-wide propagation of the Gospel, it became vitally necessary

to explain precisely what the convert was expected to believe. How could it be said that Christ was both God and Man, and if He reigned in heaven what was his relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit and to His earthly followers? The answers to all such questions were determined by processes of thought devised by Greek philosophy. The author of the Fourth Gospel, who was the first of the Christian theologians, used the actual terminology of contemporary Greek thought when he wrote: "The Word (Logos) became flesh and dwelt among us." It is impossible to grasp the full significance of such pronouncements as the Athanasian Creed, or to understand how Gnosticism and other heresies were formally confuted, without a clear knowledge of the later developments of Greek philosophy. Not until the problems of Christianity were transferred from the intellectual atmosphere of Byzantium to Rome with its traditions of implicit obedience to a ruling power, did authority take the place of reasoning. For a thousand years men ceased to think for themselves, at the behest of a ghostly Roman Empire, and even when Aristotle, the greatest of all Greek thinkers, was once more studied, there was no release as



yet for the human intellect. For Aristotle's doctrines could be used as premises from which logical deductions could be drawn, but the doctrines themselves were regarded as too sacred and authoritative to be challenged or even discussed. Nor did the Renaissance and the Reformation, which was its corollary, bring the freedom enjoyed in ancient Athens to the august prisoner. The rediscovery of Greek literature, it is true, led to a prodigious intellectual revolution, in which the vitalising power of Greek thought asserted itself in countless ways. But even the greatest of the Renaissance scholars had but a vague idea of the meaning of Greek books as human documents, and none of them realised the vast gulf which separated ancient Rome from ancient Greece. There was a tendency, which became an obsession here and there and from time to time (*e.g.* in the French works of Corneille and Racine, and in the Johnsonian age of English letters) to regard the achievements of Greek writers and artists as perfect for all ages, not merely for their own epoch, and to hold them up as impeccable and authoritative models. And an uncritical admiration was exacted for the conclusions of Greek philosophers, not for the spirit of

free inquiry by which they had been arrived at. The authority of the Roman Church was challenged, but those who made good their protests formed churches, each of which claimed to be the final repository of truth and its sole interpreter, and trampled on the old spiritual tyranny with a tyranny of its own.

If Socrates were to re-appear in our midst to-day, his reasoned opinions on the larger issues of modern life would be well worth hearing. He would have the same respect for Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Inge and our other arch-sophists that he had for Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias and the rest, and he would deal as ironically with certain famous journalists as he did with Euthydemus, Dionysodorus and Thrasymachus. As for our statesmen, and politicians, he would think them neither better nor worse than the Athenian types; he would, however, insist that Winston Churchill was less beautiful than Alcibiades. He would be greatly interested in the progress made by scientific research since Anaxagoras declared that the sun was a molten stone as large as the Peloponnese. While refusing to admit that the multitude of our scientific inventions had added anything to the sum of

human happiness by creating a complexity of comforts, he would none the less regard them as trophies set up after so many victories of reason in action. He would probably agree with the quatrain of an utterly unknown poetaster :

“ Poets of power do now themselves reveal  
In epic iron and in lyric steel—  
In every engine exquisite, that sings  
The soul’s new empire over soulless things.”

And he would see that science is not sheer materialism, but within its limitations a form of true wisdom, since it has dis-established so many bogies that formerly vexed the souls of men : proving witchcraft to be a form of hysteria, reducing mighty demons to the dimensions of a microbe, and removing rooted sorrows by mental therapeutics. “ Hysteria, microbe, therapeutics ”—reason in action (he would say) still speaks the language of Athens !

When discussing our attempts to realise the Christian ideal based on universal and unreflecting love, he would repeat his thesis : men do what they wish, not what they will. He would try to teach a lesson which we have been slow to learn—that benevolent intentions, and even benevolent actions, are apt to do more harm than

good if they are not prompted by wisdom. He would hear with approval Stevenson's stark saying: "Fools and knaves are both paid in the end, but the fools get their pay first." And he would repeat his own famous epigram, "Virtue is knowledge," as the missing half of the truth expressed in the Christian ideal of the all-sufficiency of love. Let Love and Reason enter into an equal partnership, he would suggest, and we may hope to make the world better.

The trouble for us and for him would begin when he began to tear away the sophistries, some of them new since his attack of the fever of living, which cling as closely to most of us as our skins, so that removal is a painful process. "The sophistry of ancient Greek sophists," wrote Benjamin Jowett, "is nothing in comparison with the sophistry of a religious order, or of a church in which during many ages falsehood has been accumulating, and everything said on one side and nothing on the other." Socrates would surely concentrate his attack on the sophistry of the modern theologians, not one of whom to-day dares to face the problem of reconciling his creed with militant science, which is winning daily victories on a front extend-

ing from the ion to Aldebaran and from the beginning of the sidereal system to the ending of it. As our knowledge of creation and, therefore, of its creator is deepened and widened (thus Socrates would argue), so our theory of things divine must be revised and revitalised. No theology, after all, is more than a "working hypothesis," and just as a scientific investigator casts away a theory which has done all its work and seeks a new and more fruitful one, so must the theologian seek a more serviceable creed. It was for that very purpose that God gave man his reasoning faculty, and to use it so is an act of worship.

Socrates would not be compelled to drink the modern equivalent of a cup of hemlock. But in the end every club and pulpit and newspaper would be closed against him, and if he put up for Parliament in the crankiest of constituencies, he would surely lose his deposit





